

**The Perceptions of Undergraduate Mainland Chinese
Students of the Effect of English Instruction on their
Ability to Write Academic English**

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School of Language and Culture

Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Signature:

Date: Jun 18, 2022

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Ethics Approval

Conduct of the research reported in this thesis was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC), Reference Number 21/64, on 14/04/2021 for conducting the interviews. (Appendix A)

Abstract

The main aim of this study is to investigate the perceptions of Mainland Chinese students about the challenges they face in producing acceptable academic writing at undergraduate level in tertiary institutions in New Zealand. Although a great deal of research about Chinese students' challenges in academic writing has been carried out over the years, there does not appear to be a great deal that focuses on the New Zealand context. This study focuses strongly on students' own perceptions of these challenges.

This study is underpinned by the academic literacies approach. In this approach academic writing is seen as a social and context-dependent practice that is affected by variables such as students' identities and backgrounds. The study adopts a constructivist-interpretive research paradigm and semi-structured interviews were employed to obtain the data.

According to the participants there are a number of factors that appear to impact on their ability to develop competency in English academic writing. Student feedback indicates that the English taught at Chinese schools did not seem to prepare them to meet the demands of undergraduate level academic writing. In addition, the exam-oriented approach in Chinese schools impacts negatively on the students' acquisition of English. Confucian classroom practices too, have limited students' acquisition of general communicative skills. In contrast, the participants believe that the pathway courses in New Zealand have better prepared them to meet the academic writing demands of their studies. However, inadequate or ambiguous assignment instructions, particularly with regard to the assignment writing required, hamper the development of the students' writing skills.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will give more insight into the challenges Mainland Chinese students face when they are preparing written assignments at undergraduate level. Understanding their difficulties will enable these education institutions to better meet the needs of this student cohort.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This is a study about academic writing. It assumes the position that writing does not occur in a vacuum; it occurs in a context. Therefore, any study of student writing must investigate not just the text but the authors themselves. Students must be viewed as a whole and in the broader context, not only of their learning experiences but also their cultural background. Hence, the aim of this study is to explore the prior English learning experiences of Mainland Chinese students, identifying the challenges they are facing in academic writing and how their prior learning experiences have impacted their studies in New Zealand.

1.1 Background and Motivation of study

English is playing an increasingly important role in China's economic expansion. Since joining the WTO in 2001, China has experienced an enormous need for people able to speak languages other than Chinese. This has led the Chinese Government to place great emphasis on foreign language teaching (Bolton & Graddol, 2012; Ding, 2001; Jin & Cortazzi, 2002; Zhu, 2003). The acquisition of English language has become necessary if Chinese students are to be guaranteed a prosperous future in the labour market. As a result studying abroad has become a popular choice in the 21st century, a trend referred to as "studying abroad fever" (Qiang, 2012; Xu & Gong, 2019). According to the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics (2019), in the year 2019 alone, 700,000 students were studying abroad across the world. New Zealand has always been one of the favourite choices for students wishing to pursue further education. Statistics from the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2020) also indicate that currently the majority of international students in New Zealand are Asian students, and Chinese students numbered 20,610 in 2019 and 14,130 in 2020.

These students face numerous challenges both at postgraduate and undergraduate levels. This study focuses on the difficulties experienced by undergraduate students which have been detailed in numerous research studies (Bailey, 2009; Bian & Wang, 2016; Butcher, 2010; Fujioka, 2001; Hyland, 2013; Mohan & Lo, 1985; Zhang, 2018). In particular, the

ability to write academic English has been highlighted as a challenge (Al Badi, 2015; Baratta, 2008; Bian & Wang, 2016; Cai, 2017; Day, 2018; Street, 2015; Zhang & Zhan, 2020). This study focuses on Chinese students' academic writing ability.

My interest in exploring these challenges is threefold. The first is my identity as an English teacher in Mainland China. It is my wish to gain greater understanding into the problems Chinese students are facing in order to offer better quality teaching in my future career. The study also aims at helping Chinese students studying abroad by giving them insights into how to be better prepared for their academic writing tasks. Secondly, I have experienced both the Western system and Chinese education system. I completed my middle schooling and part of my high schooling in Mongu, Zambia, and the rest of my education was completed in China. It was during the four years in Africa that I acquired the English language, which later benefited me in my academic career. I therefore have first-hand experience of both systems. Lastly, while I was enrolled in the papers for this Master's degree, I realised that a number of my fellow Mainland Chinese peers were struggling to complete their assignments in accordance with the assignment briefs. I believe the position for undergraduate Mainland Chinese students will be even more difficult as the vast majority of the students have never experienced tertiary education. They have never been required to write at length in English and they have limited knowledge of academic writing.

Another justification for focusing on undergraduate Chinese students in New Zealand is that the difficulties they are facing in academic writing needs more research (Ward & Masgoret, 2004; V. J. Zhang, 2013).

In this thesis, I have used the term Chinese students to refer to Mainland Chinese students. Chinese students from Hongkong, Taiwan and Macau have been excluded because they have received a different foreign language education. Therefore, the term Chinese students in this study only refers to Mainland Chinese students.

1.2 Purpose of research and research questions

As stated earlier, this study adopts the academic literacies approach which suggests considering students as a whole, hence the study aims to:

- identify the academic writing challenges Chinese students are facing at undergraduate level
- take the students' previous English learning experience into consideration and examine how well the students believe these experiences have prepared them for their current studies
- consider the students' socio-cultural background and how it may have influenced their ability to complete academic writing tasks
- make suggestions as to how students can be better prepared for the writing tasks that face them

With this in mind this thesis is guided by one main research question.

What are the perceptions of undergraduate Mainland Chinese students of the effect of English instruction on their ability to write academic English?

Two sub-questions are also to be investigated in detail:

- How well has previous schooling prepared Chinese students for academic writing tasks?
- What could be done to assist students in developing their academic English writing skills?

1.3 Methodology

This study is underpinned by the constructivist-interpretive research paradigm (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln et al., 2011). According to this paradigm multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others (Creswell, 2013). This approach is therefore based on the idea that people co-construct knowledge through interaction with other people and through their lived experience (Lincoln et al., 2011). In this study, I have sought to gain insight into the prior learning experiences of

the students and how their experience has impacted their current academic writing abilities.

1.4 Outline of thesis

In this study, a brief introduction chapter is presented before the extensive Literature Review in Chapter 2, which focuses on the Chinese education system and English teaching as well as the underpinning of the academic literacies model. Chapter 3 begins with the methodology of the study and data collection method, then the interview procedure and data analysis method are explained in detail. Findings of the semi-structured interviews are highlighted in Chapter 4. In the following Chapter 5, a discussion of the findings in the previous chapter is presented. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Chinese Education History and Philosophy

China has nurtured many famous philosophers and educators who have had a profound impact on its education system throughout history. Famous thinkers such as Confucius, Mencius, Zhu Xi, and many others have promoted the idea of virtue through education (Shenghong & Dan, 2004). Western philosophers have also contributed to the current education system; for example, in the early 20th century, John Dewey's pragmatism was widely promoted. Shenghong and Dan (2004) point out that the two philosophical paradigms, Western and Chinese, have co-existed for a century, although the relationship has at times been strained.

2.1.1 Brief history of Chinese education philosophy

China has been facing challenges concerning the transformation of its education system in relation to Western education practice and its own traditional educational heritage ever since Western ideologies were introduced in China. According to Deng (2011), Confucianism has deeply impacted and shaped Chinese educational thinking and practice since 200 B.C. Education guidelines were based on Confucianism until the early 20th century.

1919-1948 The Republican Period

After the Qing Dynasty, the Imperial civil service examination systems which primarily tested candidates' knowledge and understanding of Confucianism, were abolished. At that stage modern Western ideologies and schooling systems were introduced in China (Ding, 2001). Confucianism was adapting to the Western modernity while still upholding the core of Confucian ethics. However, after the New Culture Movement (1915-1919) and the May Fourth Movement (1919), Confucianism was condemned and challenged by

intellectuals. These reforms sought to promote Western ideologies, especially democracy and scientific thinking. Deng (2011) states that Confucianism at the time underwent a process of modernization in response to Western modernity, and Chinese intellectuals reinterpreted Confucianism and transformed the ideology to cope with Western ideologies. Pragmatism popularized by Dewey was influential not only in education but also in politics, media, and other fields (Zhou, 2005). However, before the forming of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the emphasis on the link between education and native culture promoted by the National Education Association led to a decline of Western philosophical influence such as Dewey's pragmatism (Zhou, 2005).

1949-1976 The Mao Zedong Period

The founding of the People's Republic of China in October 1949 led to extensive changes in the education system. According to R. Yang (2000), the most important reform of the time was all higher education was to meet the need of national construction. At the time this meant that agriculture and industry were the priority and were seen as a means to revive the economy after decades of civil unrest. Yang further noted that the guidelines and content of this reform were adjusted and consolidated according to the regulations issued by the central government. The Communist Party at the time was under Maoist Marxist policy heavily influenced by the Soviet Union, and from 1950s to the 1960s, China borrowed its education theories from the Soviet Union (Gil, 2016; Shenghong & Dan, 2004). Both Chinese traditional and Western philosophies were criticized and suppressed, and only the Marxist approach was recognized. However, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) heralded a break down in relations between China and the Soviet Union. All forms of foreign ideas were banned in China, and, at the beginning of the revolution only one kind of education theory was permitted – praise of Chairman Mao (Esherick et al., 2006). All education was shut down for around three years. Students were only allowed to learn the Quotations of Chairman Mao. Deng (2011) notes that this ten-year period not only eradicated all traces of Western philosophy but also diminished Confucian education. The reason behind the change in education was that the country was in need of an economic boost, and agricultural and industrial needs were paramount (Kwong, 2016).

1977-1999 The Reform and Opening up Period

During this period, the internationalization and globalization of the Chinese market and education system were the most striking features after Deng Xiaoping took over leadership of the Communist Party. The reforms were planned to initiate modernization of the education system, and the theories were selected from developed countries such as the UK, the USA, Canada and Japan (Ding, 2001). The initiation was described in official documents such as Decision on the Reform of China's Educational Structure (China Communist Party, 1985) and Outline of China's Education Reform and Development (China Communist Party and the State Council, 1993). According to the Ministry of Education's official documentation, the overall objectives of higher education reform were to streamline the relationship between government, society and higher education institutions, with the aim of developing a new system in which the state is responsible for overall planning and macro management, while higher education institutions follow the legislation and exercise autonomy in providing education according to the needs of society (People's Republic of China Ministry of Education, 1993). Based on the observations of Yang (2014), the policy took three major forms: studying abroad for academic staff and students, integrating an international dimension into university teaching and learning, and the development of English programmes.

These policies with other strategic reforms have drastically improved China's education both in quantity and quality. In 1986, the nine-year compulsory education promulgation, the decentralizing of education administration and the diversification of educational provision were the major thrusts of reform (Hu, 2005). It was at this time scholars selected the essence of both Western and Confucianism education ideology and reinterpreted Confucianism, and hence the rejuvenated and transformed Confucianism was established while Western culture and ideology was also modified to suit the context of China (Ding, 2001). Deng (2011) notes that the changed approach embodied both Chinese traditional culture (Confucianism) and Western culture (pragmatism).

2000-now The New Era and Quality Education

After decades of reforms and implementations, the Chinese education system reached a turning point entering the 21st century. The realization that examination-oriented education which had been long embedded in the system, did not meet the country's needs led to the introduction of Western schooling features (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). The concept of *suzhi education* (quality education) was introduced. The focus would not be on marks and examinations; instead it should be on developing the students' awareness of self-improvement and creativity (Team, 2006). With the overarching goal of achieving quality education, the government also 'imported' Western theories to reinforce and strengthen the education system. However, Deng (2011) argues that the legitimacy and suitability of Western theories are questioned by Chinese educators as China has its own distinctive cultural background, tradition, issues and problems. Deng further points out that the resurgence of traditional Confucianism combined with modernized theories that were influenced by Western theories since the 1920s has become what Chinese educators turn to for inspiration.

In 2021 the National People's Congress (NPC), the Chinese Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the government announced that deeper implementation and reforms on the education system will be taking place in the next few years. According to Li et al. (2021), the focus of the government on education in the next stage of development will not be limited to the quality of teaching but will also aim at expansion in order to allow China to become a highly educated country by 2035.

2.1.2 English Teaching History in China

English has been taught in China for more than a century (Bao, 2004). From the early 20th century up to now, the status of the language has undergone many changes. Table one demonstrates the overall status of English from the late Qing Dynasty to the New Era. We can observe that English was merely a tool to connect with the West from the late Qing Dynasty and was even regarded with hostility. During the formation of the People's

Republic of China, English was treated as a way to explore Western ideologies. The time before and after the Cultural revolution was chaotic. The English education sector at the time was almost completely shut down. Lam (2005) states that only a few institutions that taught English as a foreign language were saved by Zhou Enlai for the purpose of jobs that needed a command of English. However, the Opening Up period or the New Era has led to a change in attitude and a realisation of the significance of the English language. This has led to a revival of the teaching of English (Hu, 2005).

The promotion of English in today's Chinese education system has come about mostly because of the importance of the language for China's economic interests. Wei and Su (2012) claim that the use of English can be classified into two major categories: one is internal usage including education, medical (where most medical terms and medicine are in English), and media (world-leading movie production and the news sectors are all based on using English), and the other is external usage such as tourism, international trade, science and technology. Since China joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001 the economy has been greatly boosted. Chinese factories and companies can reach global markets and this has led to increasing job opportunities particularly for those able to communicate in English. Hu and Baumann (2014) note that the display of economic growth was visible worldwide when China hosted the 2008 Olympics. Global events, such as the Olympics, heightened the need to encourage Chinese citizens to gain more proficiency in English so, in 2001 the government made reforms to English education. The subject was designated as a mandatory subject from Grade three onwards and for developed coastal or urban cities English lessons were provided from Grade one (Bolton & Graddol, 2012; Hu & Baumann, 2014; Zhu & Yu, 2010).

Period	Time	Historical background	Status of English	Characteristic of English
Late Qing Dynasty	1861-1911	The two Opium Wars (1840s-1860s) brought great challenge and humiliation to China's ability to protect itself against Western Invasion.	English as a vehicle for gaining access to Western science and technology 'Learning the enemies' strengths in order to defeat them'.	Focus was on the transfer of scientific knowledge in secondary and tertiary institutions.
The New Cultural Movement	1911-1923	The New Cultural Movement launched criticism of the Confucian tradition and introduced various ideologies from abroad.	English as a vehicle for exploring Western philosophy and other ideas.	On the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions.
The Republican Era	1924-1949	China aligned more with the West against Japan. The ruling party sought support from the US and followed the model of the US education system.	English as a vehicle for diplomatic, military and intellectual interactions with the West.	On the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions.
PRC before the Cultural Revolution	1949-1965	In the early 1950s, China was closely aligned with the Soviet Union against the West, but the Sino-Soviet relationship broke down in the late 1950s.	The status of English declined while that of Russian was boosted. The trend was reversed in the late 1950s.	On the curricula of very few secondary and tertiary institutions in the 1950s. Promoted in the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions in the early 1960s.
PRC during the Cultural Revolution	1966-1976	A radical political movement to re-establish class struggle. Education in general suffered greatly.	English was associated with imperialism and capitalism. Western learning was repudiated.	Removed from the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions, later restored rather sporadically.
PRC Reform Era	1978 onwards	Economic reform and development, transformation from planned economy to market economy, China entered the WTO.	English seen as an essential instrument for modernization.	Strongly promoted on the curricular of secondary and tertiary institutions. Commonly adopted in urban elementary schools.

Table 1. The Status of English Sociocultural contexts and English in China. Adapted from Gao (2009)

2.1.3 Current approaches to teaching of English in China

Teaching Methodology and Curriculum

The Chinese school system consists of elementary (Grades one to six), secondary (Grades seven to nine) and high school (Grades 10-12). This system was influenced and imported from the American education system, the 6-3-3 model (Clopton & Ou, 1975). Since 1986 when compulsory education was introduced, the first nine years of school have been mandatory for all children in China. There are also kindergartens that serve as day care and preschools in China. Children from the age of one or two years old can attend kindergarten until the age of six or seven when they have to be enrolled into elementary schools.

The teaching of English in China has taken various forms and methods (Adamson, 2004; Bao, 2004; Ford, 1988; Wang, 2007). The methodologies applied in foreign language teaching were imported first from the Soviet Union and later from Western countries like the United States and the UK (Gil, 2016). Various methods were adopted. Some did not have a lasting impact, however, the Grammar-Translation Method, the Audiolingual Method and, more recently, Communicative Language Teaching have had far reaching effects (Hu & McKay, 2012).

The Grammar Translation Method which is still widely used today has been very influential. Gil (2016) notes that the method was first adapted from the Soviet Union after the birth of PRC. The method focuses on the students' ability to write and read, and limited attention is paid to speaking and listening. The Grammar Translation Method is characterized by the extensive use of translation in teaching and learning, rote learning of vocabulary, emphasis on written language and a preference for literary classic works (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Despite the wide usage of this method, it has been criticized by many Chinese scholars who blame this approach for students' lack of communicative skills; their English is colloquially known as "Deaf English" (Gong, 2013; Liu et al., 2016). The focus in the English classroom is on grammar and vocabulary, which are both

taught by using Mandarin, to a large extent ‘successful’ learning is based on students’ ability to memorise.

The Audiolingual Method, first developed in the United States, focused on achieving oral proficiency in various foreign languages (Y. Yang, 2000). This approach viewed speech as the primary focus and the process of the learning is mechanical habit development, hence memorization of dialogues and performing pattern drills constitutes the core of the instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 59). The Audiolingual Method was adapted and launched in China in the early 1960s. Yang (2000) also notes that this method was abandoned during the Cultural Revolution period because it was considered an American/Western method of language learning. Like the Grammar Translation Method, the Audiolingual Method is still widely used in many classrooms in the world today (Larsen-Freeman, 2012).

When China opened up in the late 1970s, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced into the country when Western teachers were recruited (Gil, 2016). CLT aims to develop communicative competence and fluency, and appropriate language output is the primary goal. Richards and Rodgers (2001) further emphasize that the primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse. The educational authorities in China have been promoting CLT by implementing textbooks that promote this approach, changing syllabuses and drawing up competence related examinations. However the approach is still only used by a minority of teachers and institutions (Silver et al., 2002, p. 33).

Hu and Baumann (2014) note that Chinese education officials are promoting task-based language teaching. This approach has a more open framework than the Audiolingual Method and Grammar Translation Method. The learners assume an active role, and teachers are responsible for selection of instructional tasks that guide the students’ completion of these tasks (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, Bao (2006) argues that task-based learning is not particularly effective because very little English is currently spoken in schools. Also, the method does not fit in with the current *suzhi jiaoyu* (quality

education) guidelines. These guidelines position the teachers at the output end of the teaching. Bao argues that task-based language teaching invites teachers and students to exchange roles. This directly contradicts the philosophy of Confucian, teacher-centred classroom practice.

Sun and Zhang (2021) examined the teaching practices of four Chinese teachers of English and found that, while they might theoretically support a more communicative teaching style, their approach changed when they were teaching. When they were asked what had led to this change, they responded that decisions in classroom instruction were influenced by “a plethora of socio-cultural factors” (p. 8). These included traditional Confucian thinking, examination pressure, limited resources, and observation by superiors. One of the participants explained that young teachers were observed and graded on their classroom performance by colleagues who were usually very senior or retired. These older teachers were often very conservative in their views and did not respond well to less traditional approaches.

Upon entering the 21st century, the Chinese Ministry of Education revised the English education curriculum to better prepare for the new era. According to the official documents from (People's Republic of China Ministry of Education, 2001), English is to be taught from Grade 3 onwards and by the end of Grade 6 students should achieve level 2 (see Table 2). For areas with adequate teaching resources, English can be taught from Grade 1 as long as such actions will not be a burden for the students (Gao, 2015).

From Table 2 demonstrates the main objective throughout the 12-year English education is improving students' four skills which are reading comprehension, writing, listening and speaking. The most important examinations are Zhongkao that (at the end of Grade 9) determines which high school students will attend and National College Entrance Examination (at the end of Grade 12), which determines the students' tertiary education destinations. English makes up 120 marks out of 600-820 Zhongkao total marks (total marks differ by city), 150 out of 750 in NCEE. Ford (1988) notes that students with higher marks in these exams are assigned to prestigious schools and universities, while those with lower marks attend vocational schools or give up their pursuit of higher education.

Level	General Objectives
Level 1 Achieved by the end of Grade 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to read and comprehend simple stories with visual assistance. 2. Express simple feelings, emotions and personal details. 3. Ability to write English words. 4. Raising interest in foreign culture through learning English.
Level 2 Achieved by the end of Grade 6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to communicate and share about yourself, family and friends. 2. Ability to read, comprehend and retell simple stories with visual assistance. 3. Complete simple sentences with visual assistance. 4. Interested in learning about foreign culture and traditions.
Level 3 Achieved by the end of Grade 7	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to comprehend familiar topics and stories. 2. Able to communicate with teacher or classmates regarding familiar topics. 3. Ability to read short passages and stories. 4. Ability to write and rewrite sentences with visual assistance or by following examples 5. Realization of the cultural difference through verbal communication.
Level 4 Achieved by the end of Grade 8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to comprehend dialogues and stories under daily communication contexts. 2. Ability to communicate and make suggestions regarding daily topics. 3. Read and comprehend short passages and stories. 4. Ability to write notes and simple letters. 5. Notice the cultural difference in daily communication and learning.
Level 5 Achieved by the end of Grade 9	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Comprehension on familiar topics and participate in discussion. 2. Ability to state your own opinion in various topics. 3. Ability to read and comprehend all Grade 7 -9 reading materials, including newspaper articles and magazines and overcome the challenge of unknown words. 4. Build your own appropriate comprehension strategy and utilize resources in learning. 5. Ability to draft and correct your composition based on guidelines. 6. Further understand and be aware of the cultural difference.
Level 6 Achieved by the end of Grade 10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to comprehend verbal or written materials in textbooks and express your opinion or understanding. 2. Effectively express yourself and your experience both verbally and written. 3. Fully understand the cultural background and connotations in communication.
Level 7 Achieved by the end of Grade 11	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to participate in discussion and express your suggestions and understandings. 2. Comprehend the high school reading materials including related original works and English newspapers. 3. Ability to compose practical written works such as notices and invitations. 4. Understand the cultural difference and have initial cross-cultural awareness.
Level 8 Achieved by the end of Grade 12	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to communicate with native speakers on familiar topics. 2. Ability to raise your own questions and state your suggestions and ideas. 3. Ability to write coherent and structured compositions.

	4. Understand cultural backgrounds, connotations and differences, respect foreign culture.
Level 9 Achieved by graduation from English specialized schools	1. Ability to comprehend speeches, discussions and debates on familiar topics. 2. Express your opinion on global topics such as environmental preservation, population, world-peace and development. 3. Ability to interpret and translate daily English. 4. Have consciousness about the world.

Table 2. National English Curriculum Standards (People's Republic of China Ministry of Education, 2001) Translated by the author

2.2 Students' schooling life in China

The time and endeavour invested in English learning and teaching by the Chinese Government is massive. Bao (2004) states that in 1999, China established the National Association for Foreign Language Teaching and Researching in Basic Education which is targeted to improve English teaching quality and methods. For a mainland Chinese student to graduate high school the time devoted to the study of English is formidable. Pressure on students to acquire higher marks to enter better high schools and universities is intense. A study carried out by Y. Zhang (2013) notes that a large proportion of Chinese students especially after elementary school, attend private tutoring for extra classes in English and other subjects. Hu et al. (2012) further states that the reason for Chinese students spending so much time being tutored is to enhance their performance in Zhongkao (High School Entrance Exam) and Gaokao (National College Entrance Exam).

2.2.1 Elementary school and Middle school

In China, the elementary level usually starts at the age six or seven. At elementary level, the students are not expected to devote a great deal of time to learning English. In an investigation of four elementary schools in Wenzhou Prefecture, which is one of the most economically developed prefectures in China, Hu (2008) notes that on average there are three English classes of approximately 40 minutes every week. According to the People's

Republic of China Ministry of Education (1993), compulsory education at elementary level is six years in total, and each academic year is 35 to 36 weeks long. The average time spent on English at elementary level would be approximately 420 hours.

The approach to the teaching of English at elementary level is more relaxed than that at higher levels. The Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards envisage English for elementary level to be a process by which students' interest is raised. The students learn basics such as the alphabet and basic phonetics. Fu (2015) and Tan (2015) state that the process of developing interest and good studying habits, and laying the basic foundation knowledge at elementary level is mostly to serve the purpose of having more successful learning at secondary and high school levels. Bao (2004) further states that English education at elementary level still faces great challenges even though English is compulsory. It has not been given enough attention due to limitations such as teaching resources, language environment and instruction methods (Hu, 2009).

Students enter middle school education at the age of 12 or 13 and, after three years of learning, are expected to take Zhongkao (High School Entrance Exam). This entrance exam determines whether the students will be able to attend the high school they desire. At this stage, students' English learning experiences change. They are under considerable pressure to perform well in Zhongkao at the age of 15 or 16 (Wu, 2015). The class time increases from three periods to five periods each week. The total time devoted to English classes exceeds 400 hours over the middle schooling period excluding autonomous learning time (Zhao & Campbell, 1995). Bolton and Graddol (2012) note that the use of private tutors was widespread, and students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning of the language outside of the schooling environment. The time spent on English is usually far more than 400 hours; with private tutoring, reading materials, autonomous learning and out of class activities, it might reach a more formidable period that differs from student to student.

2.2.2 High school

High school students in China undergo three years of studies in preparation for the Gaokao (National College Entrance Examination). Three basic subjects include a foreign language (normally English), Mathematics and Chinese, and six other subjects in two categories, science (Biology, Physics, Chemistry) and humanities (Geography, History, Politics). The current NCEE curriculum envisages that all students will take the three basic subjects (450 marks evenly distributed in the final exam), and either comprehensive science or comprehensive humanities (300 marks in the NCEE exam).

The English class time at high school level is considerable, according to Cortazzi and Jin (1996), on leaving high school, the students have had more than 900 hours of English instruction plus autonomous learning outside class. For high school students, the pressure from NCEE is overwhelming. Davey et al. (2007) state that their performance in this exam decides which university they would be able to apply to and this has a direct impact on their competitiveness in the job market. The People's Republic of China Ministry of Education (2020) reports that 10.71 million students registered for the NCEE in 2020. In one interview during the NCEE preparation period, a student passed a famous comment, 'One more score, you surpass thousands', it reflects how competitive and crucial the NCEE is for high school students.

To sum up, the massive time input of English instruction for a Chinese student's schooling is estimated at 420 hours for elementary and middle school, 400-500 hours for middle school and over 900 hours at high school, which adds up to over 1700 hours of English learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Zhao & Campbell, 1995). Such time input guarantees considerable exposure to English, and it is expected to allow students to gain proficiency in English in every aspect. However, the actual situation suggests otherwise (Bao, 2004, 2006; Gong, 2013; Liu et al., 2016; Tan, 2015).

2.3 English Writing Teaching in China

2.3.1 General status of English Writing in China

Learning to write in English is not the primary focus at elementary and secondary level. From the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (People's Republic of China Ministry of Education, 2011) and Table 3 we can observe that English writing instruction does not emerge before level four, and throughout the compulsory education sector writing is limited to completing relatively simple tasks such as a letters/emails or descriptive passages of one's daily life. Furthermore, the urgent need for a good performance in Zhongkao (High School Entrance Examination) is what students at this stage mainly focus on (Davey et al., 2007). Therefore, because of the relatively lower proportion of writing in the tests and examinations students are reluctant to practice writing. Writing in Zhongkao only requires around 60 words, the topic of the composition is based on what the students have learnt in the past three years or on prevalent social phenomena such as protecting the environment (Bi, 2006). Bi (2006) further explains the marking standard for Zhongkao, 10 marks are mainly graded based on content, language and organization. Clearly the main focus of the writing is still on testing the students' grammar and vocabulary. According to Xie (2008), the marking standard of Guangdong province NCEE is that 15 marks are divided into three parts, content (5 marks), language (8 marks), coherence (2 marks). At all levels of writing instruction, both native and foreign teachers use writing models selected from books or adapted from published texts to guide students to write essays (Liu et al., 2015). As a result rote memorization of the so-called 'high mark composition' format is what teachers and students have turned to (Guan, 2011). The observation by Liu et al. (2015) is that most students believe successful writing in English relies on strictly following a formula and imitating the language in the models.

2.3.2 High school writing instruction

English is learnt throughout the three years of high school, with three different types of course: the compulsory, the compulsory elective and the elective course. According to

the High School Education English Curriculum Standards (People's Republic of China Ministry of Education, 2017), compulsory courses are mandatory for all students and a test is taken after completion for graduation purposes; compulsory elective courses are set for students who wish to go on to higher education and after completion of the courses students will be allowed to sit the Gaokao (National College Entrance Exams); elective courses are provided for students from foreign language schools. Wang and Chen (2012) explain that the high school English curriculum has 11 modules. Modules one to five are mandatory for all students. From module six, English becomes elective, students wishing to take the NCEE should take Module six to eight in order to reach level eight required by the NCEE. Wang and Chen further note that schools are keen to offer elective courses through module six to eight to better prepare the students for examinations instead of offering Module 9-11 elective courses due to a lack of teaching resources and the perception that these elective courses are not particularly relevant to National College Entrance Examinations.

The five main foci of English teaching at high school level are understanding the context, reading comprehension, language knowledge (phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, written and verbal expression), cultural knowledge, and general language ability (People's Republic of China Ministry of Education, 2017). In the curriculum there are general objectives for students and teachers on all of the above. However, specific instructions on writing are not as clear as other aspects such as reading comprehension and vocabulary building. Students' writing skills are what Chinese educators have been trying to improve. For a few decades they have emphasised its importance (Cai & Fang, 2006). However, many students find the writing requirements as set out in Table 3 overwhelming. A major challenge for the students is that they have the pressure of NCEE, and other examinations and they need efficient methods to improve their writing skills in a relatively short period of time.

Course	Content instructions
Compulsory course	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Writing is aiming to narrate and exposit (for example, retell experiences, pass on information, state facts, creative writing) 2. Common applied writing structures, formats and language characteristics 3. News report structures, title characteristics and language characteristics 4. Coherence of the structure 5. Function of starting sentences, theme sentences and transitional sentences 6. Importance of context in writing
Compulsory Elective course	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understanding essays, poems, advertisements, and interviews and their language and structural characteristics 2. Argumentative writing skills and reasoning methods 3. Literature works and their writing styles and language characteristics 4. Difference between formal and informal writing 5. Information organization methods in writing 6. Grammatical skills in writing 7. Writing logic, such as reasoning, consequential relations, summarizing and using examples
Elective course	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understanding official documents, editorials and book reviews and their writing characteristics 2. Practical formal writing skills, such as suggestions, proposals, work plans and work reports 3. Understanding the formal lectures, speeches, debates 4. Recognition of metaphors, personification, emphasis, irony, exaggeration and contrast 5. Writing cohesion and coherence skills 6. Diverse methods in expressions, such as using nonverbal methods (pictures, tables, tone and voice)

Table 3. Writing Instructions for High School English (People's Republic of China Ministry of Education, 2017). Translated by the author

As indicated above there are moves in China to change the exam-oriented approach to teaching English. In particular, an approach to teaching the language in context has been stressed, encouraging teachers to move away from an emphasis on decontextualised language rules. This concept is well illustrated by Long's 1991 concept of *Focus-on-Form vs Focus-on-FormS*. The form focused idea has two categories; the *focus-on-form* instruction is defined as drawing students' attention to linguistic aspects that occur by chance or to pre-selected language pieces in communicative activities (Ellis, 2001). In contrast *focus-on-formS* is the presentation and use of decontextualized and isolated language rules and structures without any communication context (Long, 1991). Chinese English teaching has been seeking to shift from *focus-on-formS* to *focus-on-form*,

however, due to numerous sociocultural factors, especially Confucian philosophy and classroom practice, the transformation is still in process (Sun & Zhang, 2021).

We can conclude that after 12 years of learning English and approximately eight years of writing practice, the main focus for most of the students is the scores in each of the critical exams (Zhongkao and Gaokao). The purpose of the whole writing instruction is to help students to produce their own writing and help them develop a sense of creative writing (Cai & Fang, 2006; Guan, 2011; Jiang, 2013). However, the need to perform well in the exam overrides students' interest in developing such abilities. Cai and Fang (2006) conducted research on what the Chinese university students think of the current English writing situation in China. The interviewees agreed that extending the teaching time and improving the teaching quality is what is needed for most of the schools. The students also raised another very interesting suggestion. They believed that it would be useful if the teachers provided them with high quality writing models. They could then analyse the structure of these texts and attempt to imitate them.

2.4 Studying abroad for Chinese students

Over the past decades, there has been dramatic growth in the number of Chinese students wishing to pursue further studies abroad. Studying abroad has become a better choice for students to acquire the language and such a choice may provide them with better opportunities after their studies. Qiang (2012) states that upon entering the 21st century, the number of Chinese students studying abroad has been increasing by over 25% annually before the COVID-19 pandemic. The most popular choice of countries for these students are English-medium countries where they can acquire the language better than they are able to do so in domestic universities.

Numbers from OECD (2020) indicate that the admission rate of international students in New Zealand reached a new height before the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey carried out by XDF Group (2020) indicates the students' ideal target countries. The data shows UK (42%), USA (37%), Australia (16%), Canada (16%), Japan (14%), Germany

(10%), Singapore (10%), Hong Kong (8%), France (7%), and New Zealand (4%) were the top choices for them.

Around 70,000 international students are granted leave to study in New Zealand annually and 75% of these students are from Asia; predominantly China, South Korea and India (Wilkinson et al., 2010). The official statistics from New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2021) states that in the year 2017, there were over 40,000 Chinese student enrolments in New Zealand. Furthermore, the statistics provided by XDF Group (2020) demonstrate that in New Zealand's case, 73% of all the Chinese students are currently in undergraduate or higher level study, out of this number 70.37% chose to enrol on either pathway or foundation programmes and 23.46% of the students chose to apply for direct undergraduate studies.

2.4.1 Preparations before studying abroad

For the past few decades New Zealand tertiary education has witnessed a rise in the number of Chinese students (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2021; Wilkinson et al., 2010; Xiaoying & Abbott, 2006). Chinese and other Asian students choose New Zealand to pursue their academic studies because of international recognition of the quality of New Zealand's education and relatively lower costs (Ward & Masgoret, 2004). Ho et al. (2007) note that another decisive reason for students choosing to study in New Zealand is the relative ease of obtaining a student visa. However, to study at most universities, Mainland Chinese students must prove their proficiency in English. In New Zealand's case, the common university admission criteria require students to achieve a certain level in IELTS (Hayes & Read, 2004; Ho et al., 2007).

For a mainland Chinese student to study abroad, they either apply to the university or institution online or apply through an agent. Xing Dong Fang (XDF) was established in 1993 when the sharp rise of students studying abroad came about in China and it later became one of the most prestigious domestic private foreign language training

providers (Nankai University Research Group, 2013). Hundreds of foreign agencies started operating in China to assist students who wish to study abroad imitating the XDF Group (Ding, 2018). The XDF Group (2020) states that the main functions of the Chinese foreign agencies are to 1) help students to apply for their preferred institutions, 2) provide training programmes to help students cope with the future academic studies. According to Ding (2018) the agencies' current preparation courses for Chinese students to study abroad before they leave China is limited to examination-oriented training and programmes such as IELTS, TOEFL and GMAT. In New Zealand's case, applying for a student visa may not require IELTS results, however, to be admitted for university studies, students have to hold the requisite IELTS scores (Beijing Youth, 2004). Hence most of the foreign agencies provide IELTS training for students preparing to study in New Zealand. Ma (2012) states that after the language training only a few agencies provide some background to prepare the students for academic studies abroad such as intercultural communication skills or academic writing training.

Like all international students, the challenges and difficulties Chinese students face when studying in New Zealand are multi-dimensional. Based on previous research, lack of language skills was the most common problem faced by Chinese students (Haugh, 2016; Henze & Zhu, 2012; Zhang & Mi, 2010). The lack of proficiency in English affected not only their social lives but most importantly influenced their academic performance. Such academic difficulties included poor participation in class and an inability to understand task requirements which often led to students receiving poor grades. In a study which set out to find what is the greatest concern for Chinese students in foreign universities, Zhang and Mi (2010) note that many students did not worry about their oral English deficiencies, reading and writing was more problematic because they read very slowly and often struggled to understand the text, and the need to produce quality written work in English is sometimes overwhelming.

2.4.2 IELTS

One of the misunderstandings common in China about studying in New Zealand is that since the student visa does not have language requirements IELTS is not needed

(Beijing Youth, 2004). The fact is that IELTS or the equivalent is required for undergraduate level study in New Zealand. For most undergraduate studies, at least band 5.5 to 6.5 (depending on the major) is required for international students. IELTS is considered a gatekeeping test, assessing students' ability to study in the English language-speaking environment (Clark & Yu, 2020).

Another misunderstanding is that having the requisite IELTS score means that the student has the linguistic ability to succeed in academic studies. It is widely recognised in academic circles that simply reaching the designated standard in IELTS does not mean that students will not struggle with academic writing: successful completion of IELTS merely suggests that the student has the potential to start tertiary level studies (Dooey & Oliver, 2002; Hayes & Read, 2004; Wata, 2019). It is clear that preparing for language entry exams is often not sufficient to equip the students to cope with English academic writing.

2.4.3 Pathway Programmes

Instead of enrolling directly on undergraduate studies students could choose to enrol in pathway courses or foundation courses. Successful completion of such courses often enables L2 (English as a second language) students to enrol directly on undergraduate degrees. Chinese students who wish to avoid the fierce competition of NCEE in China could attend pathway programmes and foundation studies after Grade 11, and students who had unsatisfactory scores in NCEE could also choose foundation studies to pursue their further studies abroad.

The major barrier for most international students is that at both the academic and social levels, a lack of language ability is the most significant impediment (Perry et al., 2016). According to recent research by Reyes and Zhang (2020), pathway programmes and foundation studies can help eliminate, or at least mitigate, such barriers for Chinese students arriving in Western education systems. The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses at foundation level are aimed to equip students with the basic knowledge

they need to cope with undergraduate level tasks (Dooey, 2010). However, Benzie (2011) states that pathway programmes may have prepared the students to a certain degree, but the curriculums provide limited training on academic literacy. Despite undergoing the pathway foundation studies, a number of students still lacked the skill to express themselves at undergraduate level, participate and contribute to group discussions and clarify uncertainties with their lecturers about their essays and assignments (Chen, 2014; Henze & Zhu, 2012; Ho et al., 2007).

2.5 Academic Literacy, Academic literacies and EAP

Academic literacy in tertiary education refers to the ability to write and read various texts assigned at university level (Spack, 1997, p. 3). Academic literacy encompasses much more than academic writing, despite the fact that the word is often used to refer only to writing. Wingate (2018) sees academic literacy as the capacity to effectively communicate in an academic discourse community, which includes reading and analyzing information, as well as presenting, arguing, and generating knowledge via both speech and writing (p. 2). To conceptualize a single form of literacy is not appropriate, instead it is generally agreed that in the international context there are ‘multiple literacies’ (Street, 2015).

2.5.1 Academic literacy/ies

According to Duff (2010), academic literacies refers to ‘the forms of oral and written language and communication-genres, registers, graphics, linguistic structures, interactional patterns – that are privileged, expected, cultivated, conventionalized or ritualized’ (p.175). Academic literacies originated from the 1990s as a result of practice-oriented research conducted in the UK’s higher education sector (Wingate & Tribble, 2012). The concept of academic literacies is derived from the ‘New Literacy Studies’ (Barton, 2001; Lea & Street, 1998; Street & Street, 1984) in which writing and reading are seen as social and context-dependent practices that are affected by variables such as students’ identities, epistemologies of the various disciplines or power relations.

2.5.2 Academic literacies approach

The academic literacies approach could be conceptualized into three perspectives or models: a study skill model, an academic socialization model, and an academic literacies model. The models are not mutually exclusive, rather they overlap, one model does not replace or supplant the other in terms of insights (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006). Lea and Street (1998) further explain that each model encapsulates the one before it; for example, the academic socialization model adopts the study skills model's perspective and broadens the context. The academic literacies model embodies both models in order to form a better understanding of the nature of student writing including power relations, institutions and social identities (Street, 2015).

The *study skills model* focuses on the surface features of the language, such as grammar and spelling. The approach assumes that literacy is a collection of 'atomized skills' that students must achieve and presumably be able to transfer to other contexts (Lea & Street, 2006).

The *academic socialization perspective* assumes that students need to be inducted into a new academic 'culture' in order to succeed in writing (Lea & Street, 1998). According to Lea and Street (2006), the approach implies that the disciplinary discourses and genres are consistent, that once students acquire the fundamental principles of one academic discourse they would be able to reproduce them in another.

The *academic literacies approach* incorporates the previous two approaches but it views students' writing at the level of epistemology and identities rather than just skill or socialization (Lea & Street, 1998). Lillis (2003) further states that the academic literacies approach emphasizes the socially situated and ideological aspect of student academic writing, and so serves as a lens through which the previous two approaches can be seen. The academic literacies approach is concerned with meaning making, identity, power and authority (Lea & Street, 2006). It focuses on the prominence of the institutional nature of what is regarded as knowledge in a particular academic context.

2.5.3 EAP

English for academic purposes (EAP) is a branch of English for special purposes. Durrant (2019) sees EAP as focused on comprehending English usage in academic contexts. EAP can be also defined as the teaching of English with the specific aim of helping learners to study, conduct research or teach in that language (Peacock & Flowerdew, 2001, p. 8).

The importance of EAP has come about due to the massification, internationalization, and diversification of higher education (Shannaq, 2021). Students who do not speak English as a first language must learn the language as well as grasp the relatively conventional standards of academic writing in their disciplinary areas in order to progress their careers, comprehend their fields, and be effective learners (Hyland, 2006). In other words, EAP is concerned with the acquisition of academic language and it claims to provide students with understanding of linguistic textual patterns that will be useful in their subject studies (Hyland & Shaw, 2016).

2.5.4 EAP and academic literacies

Lillis and Tuck (2016a) state that the EAP and academic literacies both spring from practitioner concerns and a desire to use theory and empirical research to assist students in succeeding as writers and communicators in an increasingly globalized, English-dominant academy (p. 36). Despite the similar rationale of the two approaches, Lillis and Tuck (2016a) also list some key differences between EAP and academic literacies. To begin with, text is the primary focus of EAP, whereas the writer or producer of the text is the primary focus of academic literacies. Secondly, EAP uses ‘standard (academic) English’ which is used by native speakers, but academic literacies, on the other hand, challenges the notion that there is only one standard academic English and recognizes that students may bring their own English vernacular patterns. Thirdly, academic literacies concentrates on the diversity and life experience the students bring into the academy. EAP places greater emphasis on the outcome of students’ transition from novice to expert. Lastly, in EAP, once the norms, genres and discourses have been identified, students are introduced to them and are expected to be able to put them into

practice in their own writing. Academic literacies emphasize flexibility, that academic discourse evolves in response to the needs of its users. As a result, it is up to gatekeepers and other stakeholders, including students themselves, to transform it (Lillis & Tuck, 2016b, pp. 36-37).

To conclude, the recognition of EAP and academic literacies has been what the current Western academic world has been promoting, as both fields are motivated by a desire to make the often implicit character of academic conventions clear (Lillis & Tuck, 2016a).

2.5.5 Writing and identity and students' agency

The linkage between academic writing and students' identity has been widely recognized by Western scholars (Anderson, 2019a; Canagarajah, 2002; Fox, 1994; Ivanič, 1998). As mentioned in the previous section, writing does not only reflect students' ability to produce academic works but also is a 'social practice', factors such as individual personalities, life experiences and cultural backgrounds contribute to the complexity of L2 students' writing styles (Fox, 1994). Merrill (2015) states that as students are making their way through academic study, they can think about who they want to be, which may necessitate their relinquishing parts of their previous identity and developing a new identity. The social, institutional, and personal environments in which students are involved during their university education help shape this new identity.

Jackson (2003) asserts that obtaining and sustaining academic identity requires students to devote substantial time and energy in academic pursuits such as reading, writing, and questioning. What matters most is that students develop a strong belief in their own ability to grasp challenging academic topics via consistent, deliberate effort. Hence, students undergoing tertiary level education experience a life-changing process, not only academically but also as far as their sense of identity is concerned.

2.6 English Academic Writing

Academic writing has generally been used as an overarching word to refer to the many types of writing and writing assignments that may be found in academia. While academic writing is not, of course, confined to English, the global spread of English means that it is the accepted academic lingua franca (Jenkins, 2014). As indicated earlier one of the most important reasons Chinese students cited for enrolling at New Zealand universities was the opportunity it presented them to improve their command of English, and this includes academic English.

In recent years, the growing numbers of international students and academics all over the world has led to the requirement that they need to become fluent in academic writing in order to display their understanding of their disciplines and thrive in careers. Hyland (2013) mentions three major developments that resulted in academic writing have attained enormous attention. First, is the expansion of tertiary education in various countries that led to diversity of the student body. Also, the universities and higher education institutions are being more exposed to “teaching quality audits” by funding agencies. And the writing as well as publishing for most academics and students now has to be done in English. (Hyland, 2013, p. 54).

Students’ academic performance is usually linked with their academic writing ability, due to most of the assessments they encounter in tertiary level being written assessments. Patel et al. (2011) note that written assessments may account for up to 90% of a student’s overall mark in a course. Academic writing is a common emphasis of EAP instruction since it is an area of communicative skills that might be challenging for many students attending higher educational courses in English as a second language. This is because writing training is usually the most important aspect of an EAP course (Bruce, 2013). Irvin (2010) describes academic writing success as based on the students’ understanding of the topic and approach to the writing task. However, it has become a dilemma for numerous international students. And because of the significance of academic writing at tertiary level, it has raised great attention on whether the students have the ability to cope with the challenges in writing (Skyrme, 2018). Clearly a lack of mastery of academic

English will have serious repercussions on students' academic success. The skills needed to produce acceptable academic writing are not limited to using accurate language (grammar, vocabulary and structure) and the organization of ideas in a logical order, but also require students to be able to gather and paraphrase information (McNamara et al., 2018).

In conclusion, for any first-year undergraduate student, the writing requirements may be overwhelming. Al Badi (2015) reports that, of the basic difficulties students encounter in academic writing, the most often encountered problem is language usage, coherence, and cohesiveness, which is followed by both expressing one's own voice and choosing a major subject and appropriate references, which are all very frequently encountered difficulties.

2.6.1 Difficulties Chinese students face in using academic English

Research indicates that the challenges faced by international students are often closely related to social and cultural differences (Feng, 1991; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Xu, 2015). As mentioned in Chapter 1, the education system in China has gone through centuries of reforms and since the opening-up period, China has developed a unique education system that is different from Western education systems. Chinese students walking out of that system and encountering the Western system, may find the transition challenging.

Social and cultural challenges

There are numerous social and cultural challenges that Chinese students face. One of these challenges is the pressure that is placed upon them by their parents. Parents expect students to succeed in their studies. This parental pressure causes children to become more anxious, which may have negative consequences (Choi, 2013). Another challenge for them is to move out of their comfort zone. Chinese students tend to make friends largely with other Chinese students. This leads to limited intercultural communication, between the Chinese students and their classmates, and even with their lecturers. The

reason for lack of communication identified by Mak (2011) is that Chinese students experience anxiety and uncertainty about their language proficiency and this leads to a reluctance to use English.

Educational challenges

These social and cultural challenges also lead to educational issues. One of these is the tendency of Chinese students not to participate actively in class. As the Confucian ideology which prevails in China education is usually didactic, instructive and descriptive in nature (Rao & Chan, 2010), lecturers are seen as the authority. This results in students being reluctant to ask a lecturer questions for fear of being seen as challenging their authority (Hodkinson & Poropat, 2014). Hodkinson and Poropat (2014) further suggest that Chinese students also tend to avoid answering questions if they are uncertain so they would not lose face in public. All these factors result in Chinese students' reluctance to participate in class and question their lecturers and communicate with their non-Chinese speaking peers.

Lack of English exposure in China. One of the factors causing the Chinese students' lack of proficiency is that they have limited exposure to the English language (Liu et al., 2016). Although the students receive a great deal of instruction there is little interaction in the classroom. Liu et al. (2016) further state that Chinese students have limited ways outside school to gain more familiarity with the language.

Writing instruction during secondary education. The writing instruction that students receive at middle school or high school in China is primarily focused on passing exams. Topics are rather banal and word requirement is very limited.

Lack of familiarity with English academic writing. Bian and Wang (2016) state that currently in China, English academic writing is only taught in the final year of English majors to fulfil the requirements of a thesis or dissertation. Most Chinese students who

are enrolled in pathway or foundation programmes or directly enrolled for undergraduate level studies have finished Grade 10 or Grade 11 in China. These students would never have encountered academic writing or have had any academic writing training if they were only in common public high schools.

2.6.2 The academic writing style vs. Chinese writing style

General difference

The difference in writing style leaves Chinese students confused when they first encounter academic writing. Kaplan (1972) describes the Chinese writing style as indirect:

The development of the paragraph may be said to be “turning and turning in a widening gyre.” but the subject is never looked at directly. Things are developed in terms of what they are not, rather than in terms of what they are. in a modern English paragraph would strike the English reader as awkward and unnecessarily indirect. (p. 46)

Zhang and Zhan (2020) explain that the logic of Chinese composition is like peeling an onion, it is layer after layer before reaching the core. Such indirectness is confusing for native English speakers.

Chinese students lack organizing tools, such as relative clauses, conjunctions, subordinate clauses, and other grammatical or lexical connections, which are extensively used in English writing to convey relationships between concepts and make meaning plain and logical (Mu, 2007). Such rhetorical issues lead to lack of cohesion and coherence in the writing presented by Chinese students. Jiang (2013) points out that native English speakers have trouble recognizing the key themes in Chinese students’ writing.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has briefly reviewed the education philosophy in China since the beginning of the 20th century, as well as presenting the English teaching curriculum and teaching

method shifts through the same period of time. Students' input into English learning in China and the English learning and writing instructions they receive before tertiary education was also discussed in this chapter. In addition, the chapter also presented the theoretical framework that underpins this study, by using the academic literacies approach. A comparison between EAP and academic literacies, students' agency and writing identity were also presented in the chapter. Furthermore, the chapter also discussed the criteria for successful academic writing as well as the barriers Chinese students are facing in English academic writing. In the next chapter, the methodology of this study is discussed.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the literature on the history of China's educational philosophy and history, English writing teaching in China and the study-abroad preparations of Chinese students. In addition, current perspectives on English academic writing were reviewed and contextualised for the scope of this study. In this chapter the justification of the research methodology will be presented, as well as the philosophical paradigm that underpins this research. The chapter also describes how the data was collected and analysed.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate how Chinese students believe their English learning prior to their enrolment on undergraduate programmes at New Zealand universities (including schooling in China and foundation or language programmes in New Zealand) impacted their ability to write acceptable academic English. Understanding the challenges and concerns Chinese students are facing while writing academic tasks and what assistance they would like, could help mitigate the challenges they face in this regard. The overarching research question that guides the study is:

- What are the perceptions of undergraduate Mainland Chinese students of the effect of English instruction on their ability to write undergraduate level academic English?

3.2 Methodological paradigm

A paradigm is the overarching constructive framework and the meta-thinking behind a piece of research (Hua, 2015). The significance of presenting the research paradigm is that it represents the general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study (Creswell, 2014). This study is underpinned by a constructivist-interpretive research paradigm (Lincoln et al., 2011). Creswell (2013) describes this approach:

In this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences ... These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views ... Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individual's lives. (pp. 20-21)

This approach is therefore based on the idea that people co-construct knowledge through how they interact with other people in a given society and through their lived experience (Lincoln et al., 2011). Therefore, in the interviews with the Chinese students, I sought to understand the perceptions of each of the participants on learning English, focussing in particular on the skill of writing, and the instruction they had received in China.

3.3 Data collection method

3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are classified into three different types based on the manner and conduct of the questioning: structured, semi-structured and unstructured or open interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As the focus of the research is understanding the phenomenon from the participants' perspective, I employed semi-structured interviews (see Appendix E) as the data collection instrument as this enabled me to have a certain number of fixed questions and at the same time I had the flexibility during the interview to ask more questions when this was appropriate. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) note that interviews are a powerful data collection method as they allow one-to-one interaction between the interviewer and interviewees. Interviews help researchers to identify how individuals organise their own worlds and the meanings they attach to the action they take in these worlds. Therefore, the aim of conducting interviews is to allow researchers to explore the interviewees' worlds (Patton, 2015). Conducting the interviews in Mandarin ensured that language difficulties would not limit the participants' responses. In addition, the fact that I shared a cultural and linguistic background with the participants and had experienced

the same difficulties meant that it was easy to establish rapport.

However, using semi-structured interviews also has limitations. According to Denscombe (2010), interviewees may wish to please the interviewer. Or they may respond in a way that they think the situation requires (Gomm, 2008). For example, students may give inaccurate answers, so they do not lose face. To overcome this problem, I approached the students in a friendly manner and allowed the interviewees to read the questions before the interview. Before the interview I explained the purpose of asking such questions and the importance of them giving an accurate account of their experiences. My own schooling experience in China was similar to the interviewees. In addition, as an MA student I am not in a position of authority.

3.3.2 Research location

The locations of interview were chosen to make sure they were convenient for the participant and relatively quiet in order for the interviews to be recorded clearly. Most students were interviewed at the AUT City Campus.

3.3.3 Inclusion Criteria

In order to participate in this study, the students needed to meet certain criteria. All participants:

- were first language speakers of Chinese
- were undergraduate students studying at New Zealand universities or polytechnics
- had undertaken their schooling in China until starting their studies abroad

3.3.4 Ethics

An ethics application was submitted to the Auckland University of Technology Ethics

Committee (AUTEC) for this study (Application number 21/64). The interviews were conducted after obtaining ethics approval on April 14, 2021.

3.4 Interview procedure

Upon obtaining ethics approval, ads (Appendix B) were sent to various group chats for Chinese students. Once I had received a few initial responses I employed snowball sampling, which is one of the most common sampling strategies in qualitative research (Parker et al., 2019). Typically, researchers begin with a limited number of initial contacts (seeds) who meet the research requirements and are invited to participate in the study. The willing participants are then asked to propose other contacts who meet the research criteria and might be willing volunteers, who subsequently refer more possible participants, and so on (Goodman, 1961).

Initially four students who fitted the criteria responded to the ad and after the interview I asked them if they would tell other students about the research project. Six participants contacted me as a result of this request and the final five participants were contacts of the last six students. The convenience of using the snowball method for this study is that the initial participants were aware of the criteria, hence the suggested contacts fitted the criteria for this study. Before the interview, students were sent the information sheet (Appendix C).

The interview questions (Appendix E) were designed to fulfil the overarching research question of this study. A reading of the relevant literature combined with my own experience of education both in China and an English medium university enabled the development of the guiding questions. I came up with specific questions and my supervisor recommended some adjustments.

Rapport between the interviewer and interviewees is essential for interviews, especially semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Doody & Noonan, 2013). I started the

interviews by introducing myself formally and stating the aim of the study again. I explained that their confidentiality would be protected as I would use a code name for each interviewee. The average duration of the interviews was about 15 to 25 minutes.

The interviews were audio recorded, and I transcribed the interviews and sent the transcripts to the interviewees to read and check. The interviewees were free to edit the transcript in any way they thought fit. The data analysis started after all the students had returned their interview and given consent for the data to be used.

3.5 Data Analysis

In this research, thematic analysis was used to identify the themes emerging from the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a method of data analysis that researchers used to identify and report the patterns emerging from the data collected. Transcribing the data is the first step before any analysis. Ellis (2005) recommends that the researcher should transcribe the recordings himself or herself since listening to and re-listening to the data while transcribing allows the researcher to become very familiar with the material. In order to analyse the interview data, I followed the six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Terry et al. (2017).

The first phase was familiarizing myself with the data. I transcribed all the interviews into Chinese and then translated into English, most transcribing and translation were done on the same day as the interview so that my recollections were clear. I then sought to gain a better understanding of the data by reading through the transcripts multiple times. Four of the translated interview transcripts were sent to my supervisor for the next stage.

The second and third phases are generating codes and developing themes. I coded the student comments, highlighting the words and sentences using different colours, to identify similar ideas, my supervisor and I each independently came up with codes with

the four selected transcripts. These codes were then compared, and after discussion we settled on a number of appropriate codes. These codes eventually led to the generation of themes. For example, the category English learning experience in China – gave rise to the theme: English learning experience in Chinese schooling did not seem to have prepared the students to meet the demands of academic writing at undergraduate level.

Armed with this background I then coded the remaining interviews and modified the themes. Once this had been completed, I moved to the fourth phase, where, aided by my supervisor, I reviewed the finalised themes to ensure that the potential themes generated were logical and coherent. The fifth phase entailed the accurate definition and naming of the themes. Terry et al. (2017) describes this stage as the quality control stage of the analysis. The naming of themes was discussed with my supervisor to ensure they accurately reflected what the findings displayed.

3.6 Summary

In conclusion, this chapter gave an overview of the methodology and procedures used to address the research question for the current study, as well as justification and discussion of the methodology and methods employed. I described the data collection method and data analysis procedures in detail. The results of the qualitative research are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of the interviews will be presented. A total of 15 Chinese students who were studying in four different universities or polytechnics located in Auckland, New Zealand participated in the interview. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the interviews were designed to collect participants' demographic information, their experiences learning English, particularly English writing, as well as their perceptions of the impact of prior learning experiences on their current studies.

4.2 Demographic information

At the time of the interviews of the 15 students, ten students were under the age of 20 and five students were 20 years old or older. All the students were native Chinese speakers from China. Among the participants, seven students were male and eight were female.

Participant	Age	Gender	Major	Arrival in NZ	Language course	Foundation programme
S1	19	Female	Business	2019	6 months	12 months
S2	20	Female	Business	2019	3 months	12 months
S3	21	Male	Biology science	2019	6 months	12 months
S4	23	Male	Sports and recreation	2018	3 months	8/9 months
S5	21	Male	Music	2019	3 months	12 months
S6	19	Female	Education	2020	None	8/9 months
S7	21	Female	Construction	2020	None	12 months
S8	19	Male	Fashion and design	2018	6 months	12 months
S9	19	Female	Data science	2019	None	12 months

S10	19	Male	Engineering	2019	None	12 months
S11	18	Male	Computer science	2019	6 months	12 months
S12	18	Female	Business	2019	6 months	12 months
S13	19	Female	Business	2018	12 months	12 months
S14	19	Male	Business	2019	3 months	12 months
S15	19	Female	Business	2019	3 months	12 months

Table 4. Basic Information of Participants.

As shown in Table 5, all the interviewees arrived in NZ between 2018 and 2020. Every student attended a foundation programme for at least six months; the foundation programmes varied from six months to a year. Students whose English language proficiency did not meet the foundation provider's requirements, normally either an IELTS 4.5 or a pass in a foundation entry English test, undertook three to six months language courses before embarking on foundation studies. The interviewees who participated are students from 10 different undergraduate majors, a business major was the most popular choice of study.

4.2.1 Time at which English Learning Commenced

The interviewees all started learning English at a young age. In accordance with the national reforms carried out in 2002, schools must teach English at primary school level; for areas with adequate teaching resources English is taught from grade 3 and for areas with greater resources the Ministry suggests that English should be taught from grade 1 or even earlier i.e., kindergarten level (People's Republic of China Ministry of Education, 2002, 2011). Fourteen out of 15 students came from well-resourced areas in China and started English before grade 3 in primary school, the other student who came from a less well-resourced area started learning English in Grade 6. Among the 14 students, five of them started English in kindergarten, four started in Grade 1, three students started learning English in Grade 3 and the other two could not recall the exact grade, but it was before Grade 3.

4.2.2 Assessed Language Proficiency in China

The interviewed students had all taken their high school entrance exams (Zhongkao) in China, and three of them had also taken national college entrance exams. Three out of 15 students did not reveal their English scores, the other 12 students' scores are shown in Table 6.

Participant	Zhongkao	NCEE	Participant	Zhongkao	NCEE
S1	Around 90	Not taken	S8	Couldn't recall	Not taken
S2	Around 110	Around 110	S9	Around 80	Not taken
S3	Around 90	60-70	S10	69	Not taken
S4	Couldn't recall	Not taken	S11	Around 100	Not taken
S5	Around 30	Not taken	S12	Around 100	Not taken
S6	118	128	S13	70-80	Not taken
S7	110	Not taken	S14	Couldn't recall	Not taken
S8	Couldn't recall	Not taken	S15	Exempt	Not taken

Table 5. Participants' English scores in China

The total marks for the Zhongkao English exam are 120 and NCEE are 150. Although achieving 60% is a pass, a pass does not guarantee students' entrance into their ideal schools or institutions in China. For instance, according to the statistics provided by Education Online (2021), to be enrolled into one of the top high schools in China, a student's total score needs to be higher than 500-650 out of 600-800 (total marks vary with provinces) to have a chance to be admitted. Therefore, a student needs to score at least 80% ($500/600=83.3\%$, $650/800=81.2\%$) in each subject to have a chance of being admitted by top ranked high schools. As shown in the table, five students were able to score handsomely in their Zhongkao, and one student was even exempt from the English test which indicates that until middle school their English performance was good. Four participants scored in the range from 70-90 which is considered to be an average score

for Zhongkao exams.

For participants to be accepted at the top ranked universities, students need to score more than 650 out of 750 in the NCEE. In the English category, the average scores of students admitted into top ranked universities in 2021 was around 130 out of 150 (Education Online, 2021). This means any students wishing to be enrolled into higher ranked universities in China, would have to score more than 85% ($650/750 \approx 86.7\%$) in each subject. This was problematic for some students:

My English score was actually below average in our class, and my total marks were not enough for the top ranked universities, it prompted me to study abroad.
(S6)

As shown in Table 6, two other students decided to study abroad after taking their NCEE, the other students made their decisions earlier. A survey carried out by Liu and Yuan (2018) indicates that many students choose to study abroad to avoid the fierce competition in NCEE. Their lack of confidence that they will succeed in NCEE and thus be able to enrol at higher ranked universities in China drives the students to seek other options such as studying abroad. This concern is not misplaced. As far back as 2001 Li (2001) notes that there are about 50 million students who had little chance of gaining entry into a top ranked university.

4.2.3 Assessed Language Proficiency in New Zealand

Most of the participants decided to skip NCEE exams and start preparing to study abroad after taking their graduation test in Grade 11. For those whose NCEE scores were unlikely to gain them entry to the universities of their choice, studying abroad was a viable option. A New Zealand student visa does not require mandatory IELTS, or other proof of language proficiency, but tertiary providers require the students to meet a certain language standard. The participants' required scores at their respective tertiary institutions are shown below in Table 7.

Participants	Major	IELTS Required
S1	Business	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5
S2	Business	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5
S3	Biology science	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5
S4	Sports and recreation	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5
S5	Music	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5
S6	Education	Overall band 7.0 no band less than 7.0
S7	Construction	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5
S8	Fashion and design	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5
S9	Data science	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5
S10	Engineering	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5
S11	Computer science	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5
S12	Business	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5
S13	Business	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5
S14	Business	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5
S15	Business	Overall band 6.0 no band less than 5.5

Table 6. Language entry requirements for participants' major in respective institutions

All 15 students had either taken IELTS or passed the language programme and held a certificate proving their proficiency in English. Their results are shown below in Table 8.

Participant	Type of test	Attempt 1	Attempt 2	Attempt 3
S1	Foundation language test	Pass		
S2	Foundation language test	Pass		
S3	IELTS	Band 5	Band 5.5	
S4	TOEFL	50	70	83
S5	IELTS	Band 4.5	Band 6	
S6	IELTS	Band 5.5	Band 6	Band 7
S7	IELTS	Band 6.5		
S8	IELTS	Band 5	Band 6	
S9	IELTS	Band 4.5	Band 5.5	
S10	IELTS	Band 5.5	Band 4.5	
S11	IELTS	Band 5	Band 5.5	
S12	IELTS	Band 5.5		
S13	IELTS	Band 5.5		
S14	Foundation language test	Pass		
S15	IELTS	Band 5.5	Band 6	

Table 7. Participants' IELTS, TOEFL or other language proficiency test scores

Of the 15 students, one had taken TOEFL, three had taken the foundation entry English test and 11 had taken IELTS to be enrolled for either a language programme or foundation studies. Nine out of the 11 students who took the IELTS had taken the exam more than twice. Three of the participants took a foundation language entry test provided by the institution where they intended to enrol; the test was done online with an examiner hired by the foundation programme provider. Students' speaking and writing were tested within an hour, the exam standard imitated IELTS writing and speaking, As shown in the table,

for most of the students the IELTS scores were not a problem, but they were not old enough and/or did not have the school leaving certificate necessary to enrol for undergraduate studies in New Zealand.

Based on the interviewees' previous performances in English tests, and in accordance with the IELTS in the CEFR scale (IELTS, 2022) and Performance Descriptors for the TOEFL IBT Test (TOEFL, 2022), I have divided the students into categories of English users: most students' score fall under the B2 (independent user) category and one student reached C1 (proficient user). For students who did not take IELTS or TOEFL, their NCEE scores were used to determine their proficiency, with 60% * 150 as an average user score, 80% * 150 as a good user score, the average user being students with less chance of entering high ranked tertiary institutions, and good user with chance of admission into high ranked tertiary institutions. The information is shown below in Table 9.

Participant	Group	Participant	Group
S1	Average user	S9	B2 independent user
S2	Average user	S10	B2 independent user
S3	B2 independent user	S11	B2 independent user
S4	B2 independent user	S12	B2 independent user
S5	B2 independent user	S13	B2 independent user
S6	C1 proficient user	S14	Average user
S7	B2 independent user	S15	B2 independent user
S8	B2 independent user		

Table 8. English user group of interviewees

4.3 Analysis of Interviews

The interviews were analysed and the following categories were used to discuss the data.

Four main categories emerged during the analysis of the interviews:

- Reasons for choosing New Zealand
- English learning experience in China
- English writing in China
- Learning in New Zealand

4.3.1 Reasons for Choosing New Zealand

Chinese students generally consider English speaking countries as their first choice for further studies. Apart from English being the lingua franca of the world, the students have two more reasons to choose English speaking countries. 13 of the 15 participants noted that English was the only other language with which they had some familiarity.

I have only studied English; it would be a lot of effort to start studying another minor language like German. (S11)

Two students also mentioned the English proficiency would affect their competitiveness in a future job-seeking process.

A lot of the large enterprises in China require good English proficiency, so after studying at English universities it would give me an advantage when I look for jobs. (S12)

When I am equipped with good English proficiency, I would have more choices. I could start my life and career in a lot of countries. (S4)

While these considerations would make numerous destinations possible for the students, they had other reasons for choosing New Zealand.

Safety and wellbeing

Five out of 15 interviewees mentioned that safety was one of the reasons for prioritizing New Zealand over other countries. Lower crime rates, a safer living environment, and strict drug laws were considered paramount for the wellbeing of students studying abroad.

The agents in China would give us a score chart of each country, safety was one of the categories. (S3)

New Zealand has fewer industrial infrastructure compared to China, which means relatively less pollution in the country. Four of the participants regarded a clean environment as a factor that prompted their choice. Living and studying in a country with less pollution and more scenery would make their studying process more comfortable. Five participants chose New Zealand because of recommendations from acquaintances. Relatives or friends who are living in the country or graduated from New Zealand tertiary institutions shared their experiences of living and studying in New Zealand and this influenced the participants' choice.

My cousin graduated from New Zealand, and his recommendation was the biggest influence for my decision to study here. (S13)

NZ has flexible immigration policies

Favourable immigration policies were recognized widely by participants. Also, New Zealand where English is not a mandatory requirement, is an attractive option. Two of the students said that the less complicated visa procedure and quicker visa processing period were reasons they chose New Zealand. English proficiency (mostly IELTS) was not required for student visas was what S1 felt most comfortable with.

I did not have much time between making the decision to study abroad and applying for a visa, so New Zealand was on top of my list. (S1)

Three other students thought that the Permanent Residency (PR) policies for graduates and benefits after obtaining PR were favourable hence, they were attracted by such policies.

New Zealand is often a backup choice

However, despite these answers indicating the advantages of studying in New Zealand five of the interviewees acknowledged that the country was, in reality, a backup choice. For instance, S5, S7, S8, S14, and S15's first choice was to study in North America. But due to reasons like fierce competition and visa complexities they had to adjust their travel plans, and New Zealand was where they finally landed.

4.3.2 English Learning Experience in China

The focus of this study is to understand Chinese students' perception of academic writing and how prior learning experiences are impacting their studies now. In order to understand the students' English learning experience in China, they were asked to describe their English learning from the beginning. More than half of the interviewees had experience learning English before primary school or in kindergarten.

4.3.2.1 General English Learning Experience

The participants who started learning English before entering primary school said the experience was mainly to raise interest towards learning English and the content of their learning was limited to only basic knowledge.

We learned English since kindergarten, the content wasn't complicated, the alphabet, playing games and English songs and that sort of activities. (S15)

At primary schools, where most of the participants started encountering English learning, students shared the common mode of learning which leans towards exam-oriented learning. Parents' expectations for students to score handsomely in tests drove students to use their extra time to learn English. All this was to better prepare them for the fierce competition in their later studies in middle and high school.

My parents signed me up for outside school English classes, we used to listen to cassettes and practised our listening and speaking. (S4)

All of the participants concurred that their middle and high school learning was exam-oriented learning, their sole goal was to score more in tests. Hence, the feedback of the experience of learning English emphasized the importance that was placed on rote learning, memorization, test paper practices and learning grammar rules.

We focused on vocabulary and memorization, what we learned was basically 'fixed knowledge'. (S15)

Fixed knowledge, the student explained meant that because there was little contextualization of what they learnt in class, she had the idea of what the words meant, but she did not know how to use them.

I began to focus on my English when I read Alice in Wonderland, I memorized the whole book word by word. (S7)

As the regular tests like class tests, unit tests and monthly tests are mainly multiple-choice questions related to grammatical knowledge, students have to master the rules. There was a strong emphasis on rote learning as this enabled the students to perform well in these tests.

We focused on doing test papers towards NCEE, we all used the set of test papers called Three Years Simulation of NCEE. (S2)

However, participants also argued that these teaching practices have advantages. Two of them said:

When doing multiple choice questions, I would put each of the choices into the sentence, and whichever sounded right I would choose it. So, I think language sense is helping me to pass tests. (S1)

The grammar we learnt in school is mostly for exams, but it is very systematic, precise and has given us a solid foundation of grammar knowledge. (S10)

S7, cited above, who learnt the whole of *Alice in Wonderland* by heart, noted that this exercise enabled her to “pick up her English performance”.

Although students conceded that there were positive aspects about their prior learning experiences in Chinese schools, they complained about the teaching of spoken English. They believed that Chinese teachers did not have sufficient competence in the spoken English of native speakers.

As a matter of fact, the speaking and listening were not helpful, because our teachers taught us in Mandarin, their speaking is not the same as native speakers. (S10)

4.3.2 English Writing in China

All the students interviewed stated that they started to learn how to write in English after entering middle school. Generally speaking, English writing only makes up a small proportion of the marks in exams, for Zhongkao only about 15 out of 120 marks, for NCEE only about 25 out of 150. Lack of emphasis on English writing was highlighted by seven of the interviewees.

I did not practise writing as much as other aspects like speaking or reading

comprehension. We would first prepare our listening and speaking test then for the writing part we would use the models and standard sentences or structures to complete our English composition. (S2)

Our writing in high school is still writing a letter, it was only testing our ability to write something, unlike here in New Zealand where we have to reflect on what we have learnt, and a lot of preparation is needed. (S6)

When questioned about what kind of writing the interviewees did in their schooling in China, six out of 15 students claimed that the content they wrote was 'simple'. Two of the students even used the word 'naïve' to describe the middle school English writing. 'Simple and naïve' were used by students when describing their writing because the content they were asked to write lacked depth.

The writing we learned was not native, we used very Chinese sentences and vocabulary that foreigners barely use. Our writing structure was also exam-oriented, mistake-free, and safe to have better scores. (S12)

To perform well in these writing compositions, teachers and students relied on formulaic writing or memorization of models. Seven out of the 15 interviewees claimed that their writing relied on the models from their teachers.

Our exams mostly ask us to write letters or introduce a place, so memorizing the models would guarantee a safe score for the writing part. (S13)

The Chinese English writing has its style like we should write introduction and conclusion in a certain way, and the body paragraphs should consist of a certain number of examples, we wrote to a formula. (S3)

In addition, 12 out of the 15 participants noted the word count gap between Chinese English writing and the tasks they are facing now. At the middle school level, they are asked to write about 50 to 60 words for school tests and homework. After three years of practice, at Zhongkao exams the required words are 80 to 100 words. Upon entering High school, the word count required in exams increases to around a hundred words. In NCEE English exams, the required words are normally no less than 120 but no more than 180.

I have been paying attention to this year's NCEE in Beijing, the topic was really easy, I believe a middle school student could complete the writing task. (S2)

4.4 Learning in New Zealand

The participants were asked to share whether they felt prepared to study abroad. 13 of the participants felt under prepared to begin their studies in New Zealand, only two out of 15 students felt they had the proficiency to cope with their foundation studies.

4.4.1 Foundation Programme Studies

All the participants had attended at least six months of foundation studies in Auckland. They all concurred that the programme was an essential transition period for them to adapt to the language environment and different studying mode.

In an all-English environment, I believe language is learnt not only through written or verbal form but also sometimes the gestures help us to learn the language. (S3)

At foundation programme level the students revealed that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) impacted their ability to cope with undergraduate studies, 10 out of 15 participants mentioned that foundation writing tasks were their first encounters with academic writing.

At foundation level we need to write like a native speaker, we also need to reflect our understanding and thinking in our writing. (S7)

The word choice is very different at foundation level from Chinese schooling. And we need to make sure of our writing's coherence and cohesion. (S12)

For most of the participants, foundation studies were their first encounter with academic writing and the huge leap from the Chinese school writing or IELTS writing to university assignment writing was challenging. However, four of the students had attended international high schools in China where they had experience with academic writing taught by foreign teachers. They felt better equipped to deal with the demands of academic writing.

These programmes, whether foundation programmes or international high schooling, helped the students to a certain extent, but a number of the participants noted that the foundation level writing is still very different from university assignment writing

4.4.2 University Level Writing

All the participants had attended at least a term of undergraduate studies by the time they were interviewed, they had all encountered university level tasks and assignments. Only one student felt fully prepared to engage with writing at this level.

It was exactly like how I was prepared at high school and the foundation programme. (S15)

Three of the participants were ambivalent.

The length and depth of the writing has increased at university, but as long as I can comprehend what we are asked to write I can complete the tasks. (S2)

The teachers at foundation and international high school had taught me how to handle such tasks, I know I have practised the structures many times, so tasks were not that hard. (S11)

However, the rest of the students lacked confidence in their ability to cope with academic writing demands and expressed different levels of anxiety.

University writing is a headache, I feel reluctant to write them [the assignments]. I do not know how I should write so many words. (S1)

I felt bamboozled and confused when I did my first assignment. (S3)

The anxiety of students writing their individual written assignments is mainly due to their lack of academic writing experience. In addition, other factors like disciplinary knowledge and presenting critical thinking also troubled students at this stage. It is clear that the writing challenges caused most of the participants significant anxiety as they all were very aware that their ability to write well was vital for a good academic performance. 13 of the 15 interviewed raised this concern.

Both individual and group tasks are normally essay questions. So, the ability to write directly affects my scores and leads to more consequences. (S15)

The other two students majoring in construction and engineering believed that the inability to write well would not significantly affect their grades.

I think it is about what your major is. For construction, it is more about practical skills and knowing how to operate instruments. (S7)

The writing related issues the students frequently brought up in the interview can be summarized as follows.

English proficiency

The participants were asked about the problems they found challenging when completing their assignments. A frequent answer was they lacked confidence in their English proficiency. As mentioned previously, out of the 11 students who felt under prepared to face their tasks, three emphasized the lack of vocabulary as their main concern.

I find using disciplinary words in our writing very challenging, failing to memorize these words is kind of frustrating. (S9)

I need the more academic and more advanced vocabulary in my writing to get a higher score. (S14)

The lack of familiarity with academic writing related words and students' major disciplinary words led to more concerns when completing assignments.

When I see the word count, the first reaction was how am I going to write so many words. (S1)

Hence students turn to online translating tools or other supporting tools to assist them to complete their assignments. Four out of 15 students admitted that they frequently visit translating websites to write their essays.

If my essay is almost due, I would first write in Chinese and then use translating tools and check the passage using Grammarly before I hand it in. (S1)

I think I can cover the core content of my essays, but I do need to use translating tools to assist me with advanced vocabulary and structures. (S2)

Referencing

Another issue the students raised was their confusion in referencing. At foundation level, they were only taught the basics of APA format and according to S3, the undergraduate level writing required much more than a single format.

We were only taught APA 7th format at foundation, it is very helpful. But at university, some courses needed other formats like MLA, ACS for chemistry and AMA for medical studies, so it was challenging to master them all. (S3)

Structuring

Four of the students shared their concerns with structuring their writing. They were taught various structuring methods on the foundation programmes but when they attempted to apply these to their own task writing, students received negative comments.

I think the writing we are doing now has only to do with getting higher scores, just by imitation of the model from the lecturer or previous works would promise us an acceptable score, but I feel academic writing should be more than that, I want to express my opinions more freely. (S8)

We have more concerns writing now, things like correct usage of APA format and following a certain structure to complete our tasks, unlike high school

where our focus is only to improve ability on expressing ourselves more coherently. (S15)

The reasons for their feeling challenged when it came to structuring their writing coherently and cohesively is because their writing in China never required this type of advanced structuring. The pieces they had written were too short to require much structuring. The participants who had attended international high schools had experience in structuring longer writing tasks, but the public-school students had none.

I feel the writing now has gone up many levels, in China we would only need to structure for a letter or something, but now I need to comprehend my tasks, sketch and structure my essays. (S2)

In contrast a student who had attended an international high school noted:

We learnt many writing-related skills in international high school like, avoiding using first person, citations, referencing, avoiding repetition, and also structuring. (S15)

Lack of familiarity with English writing assignments

10 out of 15 participants stated that they had never encountered academic writing instructions before attending foundation programmes in New Zealand. They complained about the lack of familiarity with what was required in writing assignments. In Chinese schools writing instructions were sometimes in Chinese and sometimes in English. However, the participants considered that these instructions were very basic and did not equate with what was required of them in the university assignments.

If it were not for the foundation programme, I believe I would have a very hard time comprehending the university writing instructions. The tasks we received

are completely different from what we did in middle and high school. (S3)

In China, we only used models and certain sentence structures to write our compositions, but now we also needed to write according to the instructions, whether the content displays critical thinking, have we included our disciplinary knowledge, or have we gone off topic. The writing is very different from what we did in China. (S9)

The other five students who had attended international high school or taken a writing related programme while in China had encountered English academic writing during that time. The foundation programme for them was a revision academic writing.

The foreign teachers at my international high school instructed us clearly how to write, including the formats, citations and other related skills. (S11)

My high school focused on practice, our essays at that time were very similar to foundation programme writing, for research essays around 400-500 words were required. (S15)

Comprehending the undergraduate writing instructions/requirements

The participants were asked whether they fully understood their task descriptions and writing requirements, and more than half of the participants claim they had trouble understanding their task descriptions.

Each course has its own requirements, and sometimes the task descriptions are vague, sometimes they are hard to follow so it makes us wonder what we should do. (S3)

The descriptions are sometimes vague, and I have to ask the lecturer in person to have a better understanding of what to do in my assignments. (S10)

Some participants claimed there were barely any suggestions and instructions from their lecturers.

We were normally asked to write without instructions, the lecturers told us to use our own imagination and expand our creativity. (S9)

Those students who had tutorials before their assignments found them very useful.

We have tutorials before our writing tasks, I would make an outline of what to write after the tutorial to make sure I have included everything required. (S6)

I would analyse the description and make a to-do list so that during my writing I would know whether I am doing what my lecturer wants to see. (S2)

Furthermore, participants felt more confident when they had the chance to hand in a draft and obtain feedback from their lecturers before submission of final essays. This gave them a better chance of understanding what they were missing and how to improve their writings in future tasks.

Sometimes I cannot get what the lecturer's requirements are, we would hand in a draft, and the feedback was more straightforward for me to understand. But if he explains in words, I probably will not fully comprehend them. (S10)

4.6 Summary

In this chapter the findings of the study were presented from the semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 Chinese students in New Zealand. The demographic information was presented in Section 4.2, including students' basic information and their assessed English proficiencies both in China and New Zealand. The interviews were aimed to allow participants to share their prior English learning experience, especially English writing learning. The findings showed that the previous English learning experience in China did not seem to prepare them to meet the standards of current undergraduate level writing. In addition, the pathway programmes seem to have provided more relevant knowledge and training that are beneficial to their current task and essay writing. Furthermore, the participants also revealed that they were unclear about the expectations and instructions given to them by their lecturers about academic writing.

The following themes emerged from the findings.

1. Students' previous English learning experience in Chinese schools did not seem to have prepared them to meet the demands of academic writing at undergraduate level.
2. The students regarded the ability to write good academic English as 'essential' for their success in undergraduate studies.
3. The participants believed that the pathway programmes in New Zealand have better prepared them to meet the demands of academic writing than the English they learnt in Chinese schools.
4. Students' ability to communicate successfully in writing at undergraduate level was compromised by the difficulty they experienced in comprehending instructions and/or ambiguous instructions regarding the required structure of assignments,

Each of these themes will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the themes that emerged from the findings are discussed in detail and the implications of the findings are presented. As mentioned in the Literature Review, this research has adapted the academic literacies approach as the theoretical framework, as this approach takes the whole student into account, not only their prior learning experiences but also their socio-cultural background which offers more comprehensive understanding of student issues. The emphasis on a greater understanding of the student, as opposed to the text produced by the student, should facilitate a better understanding of the problems faced by Chinese students. In addition, limitations of the study and recommendations are also noted.

Chinese students favour English speaking countries as destinations for their higher education studies, not only because they are avoiding NCEE competition, but also they understand that the ability to communicate in English now has profound impact on graduates' competitiveness in the Chinese labour market (Jiang, 2018). Hence, English-medium universities are Chinese students' first choices when they decide to study abroad.

Other aspects of New Zealand that attracted students was the fact that immigration policies were believed to be more favourable for international students than other English medium countries. The less complicated visa procedure and quicker visa processing period were reasons they chose New Zealand. In the research of Ho et al. (2007), Chinese students would consider New Zealand for its cheaper cost and relative ease in acquiring a visa. They have also chosen New Zealand for its safety and pleasant environment.

5.2 Their previous English learning experience in Chinese schooling did not seem to have prepared the students to meet the demands of academic writing at undergraduate level.

5.2.1 English Learning in China

Since the beginning of this century there have been policy changes in China which have resulted in students starting to learn English at a younger age (Bao, 2004; Gong, 2013; Zhao, 2013). The participants of this study indicated this change where most of them started learning English before the age of 10 and some started as early as five or six. As discussed in the literature review, the Chinese Government has made vast investments into the teaching of English. The aim is to develop a cohort of Chinese people able to speak foreign languages with a particular emphasis on English. This cohort would be able to interact with the rest of the world in the economic, cultural, technological and education sectors (Cheng & Zhao, 2016).

The reasoning was that English learning should have a more important role in the students' education life than merely being an examination subject which contributed scores for various entrance examinations. All the participants started learning English at a very young age, most of them in Grade 3 (eight to nine years old) in accordance with the regulations of People's Republic of China Ministry of Education (2011) and students from larger urban areas started earlier, often in kindergarten. The parents supported this investment into foreign language learning because they believed their children would benefit in the future.

The top Chinese 500 companies that deal in international trading or need to communicate with foreign customers prefer to hire graduates with good English skills. In the competition for positions and work opportunities in these companies, Chinese overseas graduates seem to have a slight edge because of their language proficiency (Center for China and Globalization, 2018). Hence, studying abroad in an English-speaking country like New Zealand has become a trend in China for the past few decades.

However, even after 12 years or more of English learning Chinese students still feel challenged studying abroad. The participants in this study indicated they have struggled to grasp the concept of acceptable academic writing and find it difficult to meet the standards required when writing their assignments. Upon their arrival in New Zealand, they still had to attend language courses to address their lack of language proficiency. It seems the English learning in China did not fully prepare them to commence their New Zealand studies. The problems of their prior learning experience in English can be summarized into three main areas.

Exam-oriented learning

The examination system has been part of Chinese education since the beginning of the 7th century when it was known as *keju* (Yu & Suen, 2005). The clear contrast between the Chinese and Western approaches in teaching has been noted by many scholars. Doing well in exams is a part of the Chinese psyche, more emphasis is placed on exam results and language knowledge, whereas the Western education system favours the development of contextualized usage of language (Boyle, 2000; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). All the participants had been introduced to Chinese learning mentality since primary school, where scores are crucial to allow them to enrol in high status secondary schools.

In the current system it is in high school students' best interests to work on their examination skills instead of focusing on acquiring the language. Effective coaching ensures that students achieve high scores in various examinations and helps them gain enrolment in their desired tertiary institutions. The ongoing debate about reforming and improving Zhongkao and NCEE in China is very important (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Students who have not performed well in these exams are bereft of the chance of attending high schools and universities. Instead they either drop out or attend vocational institutions or join the workforce at a very young age (Yi et al., 2013). The intensities and pressure of these examinations seem to have affected the quality of English language learning in China (Dello-Iacovo, 2009; Gao, 2015; V. J. Zhang, 2013). In order to promote their own career prospects, students need to develop test taking skills even at the expense of improving their overall ability to communicate in English. The downside of exam-

oriented education has been pointed out by both Chinese and Western scholars (Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011; Meng-ying, 2021; Xue, 2019); according to Kirkpatrick and Zang (2011), this learning approach prioritizes higher scores over the quality of education for it only emphasizes preparation and performance in tests.

	Mid-term	End of term	Qualification exam	Simulation of NCEE	NCEE
Grade 10	2	2	1	-	-
Grade 11	2	2	2	-	-
Grade 12	2	2	-	3	1

Table 9. Number of major exams for High School students in China. Extracted and translated from Xin Dong Fang (2021).

The table illustrates the major tests of high school students in public schools in China. The qualification exams shown in the table are the key for students to graduate from high school; normally students take one qualification exam in Grade 10 which serves the purpose of high school graduation, and another in Grade 11 to determine whether the candidate can sit for NCEE qualification in Grade 12 (situations may differ among provinces, but the qualification exams for high school graduation are universal requirement in China). Apart from the tests shown on the table, schools organize monthly tests in each subject, this is normally six to eight monthly tests per each school year. Given the fact that the students have to sit for as many as 40 exams which the schools assert are ‘significant or paramount exams’ (Xin Dong Fang, 2021), students seem to have little time except for studying and preparing for exams.

The students are expected to, and indeed need to, achieve well in all their subjects, not just English (Muthanna & Sang, 2015). Despite the emphasis on the importance of English it appears that the ongoing influence of the examination system means that the English taught in schools is not particularly useful. This inability to communicate clearly in English despite many years of schooling has been recognized by the Chinese scholars; they nickname the English taught in schools ‘Deaf English’ (Gao, 2015). The curriculum of middle school and high school does include content to support students’ daily

communication but the participants from public schools claim that the curriculum did not support them to transition easily into New Zealand classrooms.

As far as communication skills are concerned their inability to communicate effectively in English has also influenced the perception of Chinese students in Western classrooms as quiet learners who are afraid to raise questions and are less interactive in group activities. Furthermore, it has also prevented Chinese students clarifying issues and seeking help from lecturers and Student Learning Centres when they are experiencing problems with their writing. In contrast, participants who attended international schools encounter similar issues with task writing but it appears they are less concerned about communication; therefore, they were able to have an easier transition into their New Zealand studies.

It must be acknowledged however that Chinese students do manage to overcome many obstacles in their paths. According to the statistics from XDF Group (2020) and National Bureau of Statistics (2019), large numbers of Chinese students have graduated from EMI institutions, 700,000 Chinese students were studying overseas and more than 580,000 had successfully graduated and returned to China in 2019. But based on the feedback of the participants of this study, this journey could have been made a great deal more pleasant and less stressful if students were better prepared for what would be expected of them.

5.2.2 English Teaching Method

As mentioned in the literature review, Sun and Zhang (2021) note the Chinese EFL teachers are inclined more towards *focus-on-forms* which emphasizes the teaching of grammar, instead of moving towards *focus-on-form* which focuses not only on the grammatical form but also looks at the word in context. According to Qiang (2002), the main methods of teaching used throughout Chinese schools when teaching English are the structural approach and audiolingual method. As indicated earlier the approach to teaching English has been carefully reconsidered. Qiang (2002) believes that the methods of teaching English are expected to shift to task-based learning. However, it appears that this shift has yet to take place. Public-school teachers still widely practise the grammar

translation method, structural method and audiolingual method starting from elementary level (Larsen-Freeman, 2012; Larsen-Freeman, 1991; Liu et al., 2016). This appears to be largely due to the fact that these methods give good examination results. However international schools and other foreign language institutions in China largely employ task-based learning and encourage student-centred classrooms where they focus on students' acquisition of the foreign language and communicative skills (Dello-Iacovo, 2009; Gao, 2015). The participants of this study who attended international high schools gave positive feedback about the teaching method shift they have witnessed in China.

Recently, I took a trip home by train. I got a seat opposite a middle-aged man with sharp eyes, who kept 1 a young woman in a window seat with a little boy on her lap. The woman's eye fell on the man's face, and she immediately looked down and 2 her scarf.

As the night wore on, people began to close their eyes, but the seats were so uncomfortable that only a very heavy sleeper could manage to get any 3. The woman looked over at the man. He was still staring at her. She looked back at him with fire in her eyes. I was beginning to get 4, too.

The train moved on. The little boy was 5 awake on his mother's lap, but the woman dropped off to sleep. A moment later, he began to 6 the half-open window—one leg went over it. The man jumped up and 7 the child just before he fell out.

The 8 woke up the woman. She seemed to be in 9, and then reality dawned (显现). “Your child has been looking for an opportunity to climb out of the window,” the man said as he gave the child back to her. “So I have been watching the whole time.” The woman was 10, and so was I.

- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. A. guiding | B. bothering | C. watching | D. monitoring |
| 2. A. adjusted | B. changed | C. packed | D. waved |
| 3. A. air | B. joy | C. space | D. rest |
| 4. A. nervous | B. embarrassed | C. angry | D. disappointed |
| 5. A. almost | B. still | C. hardly | D. even |
| 6. A. drag | B. climb | C. knock | D. push |
| 7. A. grabbed | B. rocked | C. touched | D. picked |
| 8. A. alarm | B. quarrel | C. risk | D. noise |
| 9. A. sorrow | B. relief | C. panic | D. pain |
| 10. A. astonished | B. confused | C. concerned | D. inspired |

Figure 1. Beijing 2021 NCEE English Part I (Baidu Wenku, 2021).

The figure is the Part 1 of Beijing NCEE English exam. It is clear that students are asked to choose based on grammatical rules like verbs (infinitives and gerund), adjectives (attributive or postpositive) and students' vocabulary is also tested. Students are strongly encouraged to do rounds and rounds of test papers and exercises in the middle and high

school stage. Each one of these test papers consists mainly of four parts, multiple choice questions (mainly testing grammar knowledge), reading comprehension (multiple choice questions), translation and writing. Hence failing to master the grammatical rules and knowledge at middle and high school level would directly impact students' performances.

The participants claimed that during their English learning experience, memorization or rote learning was encouraged by their teachers. This memorization included vocabulary and passages from textbooks. The word lists are given to students days prior to class, and they are asked to memorize the list without any context. The word lists are taken mainly from the textbooks and taught by their teachers, but the participants seemed to barely have the chance to use all these words they have learnt in real contextualized writing situations. Participants of this study frequently used the words 'fixed knowledge' which they explained meant that they were familiar with the words but only knew how to use them in limited contexts, they had simply learnt these words. It appears that such vocabulary learning has impacted students' undergraduate learning process; they may understand every word of a phrase or sentence but are unable to comprehend and use them in their own writing. The vocabulary capacity has been emphasized since they started learning English; it appears that it is not the capacity the students are lacking; instead, it is the understanding and usage of the words in context.

The situation might be improved by adapting to task-based learning where students are given contextualized opportunities to learn words and expressions in passages they are asked to read. However, it is well to remember the old adage of not throwing the baby out with the bathwater. It has been argued that memorization of English passages has its advantages. Rote learning does not necessarily have to be useless repetition, it may assist students to solidify knowledge and deepen comprehension of knowledge (Li, 2004). According to the participants of this study, the memorization did improve their vocabulary, and they were able to develop a language sense, and exposure to the language that granted them a degree of familiarity with English.

5.2.3 Cultural Difference

The enormous cultural difference between Oriental education and Western education has a major impact on Chinese students' transition into successful learning and its influence should not be neglected.

For thousands of years the inclination towards teacher-centred learning more than a student-centred approach in accordance with the exam-oriented learning encouraged students to follow the teachers' instructions unquestioningly. Such a practice is also consistent with the practice of the Confucian classroom, where questioning the authority (the teacher) is considered impolite (Li & Wegerif, 2014). Teachers lecture according to the curriculum, and students are expected to duplicate what they have heard accurately. After the absorption of the knowledge students are expected to display innovation and creativity based on facts or words of famous ancestral scholars.

Western education has a different approach. Particularly at university level the emphasis is on evidence-based writing and students are required to think critically about the sources that they are citing in their writing. The participants found this difficult, because the Confucian approach to which they were accustomed did not encourage them to refer to other people's work, let alone criticize other people's legacy. The other dilemma is that they are conveying vague ideas by only using their own words and imagination instead of resources to back their ideas up. A number of participants have raised the concern of finding appropriate and credible sources to cite even though referencing and citation skills were thoroughly taught in foundation programmes.

The teacher-centred classrooms also means that students have few opportunities to speak English. The participants noted that the use of English was limited to use in class; they had few spontaneous opportunities to use the language and practise their speaking. In addition the widespread usage of the grammar translation method and structural method has exacerbated students' inability to communicate. (Gong, 2013). A further problem is that the tight teaching schedule in most middle and high schools, leaves limited room for any interactive class activities. The pressure on teachers to ensure their students perform

well in exams has led to class time filled with rounds and rounds of silent test paper writing. And furthermore, the class size also makes it very challenging to engage in very effective student-student interactions which would help them to practise English. The participants claimed that they lacked opportunities to acquire, and practise spoken English during their schooling, hence the communication with foreign teachers and classmates was difficult at the early stage of their studies in New Zealand.

5.2.4 English Writing in China

English writing teaching in Chinese schools is not regarded as particularly important. The marks assigned to the writing part normally only account for about 10%-15% of the whole exam, hence students' reluctance to put great effort into writing is inevitable. However, the pressure to acquire every possible score and perform well in NCEE has led students to memorize models. This approach has been effective, and it has undoubtedly influenced Chinese students' development of writing in English. The current views on English writing in China from students is that the low quality and limited time input by teachers has limited the students' writing ability (Cai & Fang, 2006). The following are the main issues that emerged from the findings.

An insufficient amount of writing is required, and the content of the writing is considered very basic

假设你是红星中学高三学生李华，你和英国好友 Jim 原定本周末一起外出，你因故不能赴约，请你用英文给他写一封电子邮件，内容包括：

1. 表达歉意并说明原因；
2. 提出建议并给出理由。

注意：1.词数 100 左右；

2.开头和结尾已给出，不计入总词数。

Figure 2. Beijing 2021 NCEE English writing

Figure 2 is the 2021 Beijing NCEE English exam paper, writing part (Baidu Wenku, 2021). The question was:

Reply to an email to Jim as Lihua, a Grade 12 student at Hongxing high school, explaining why you cannot make your appointment. You need to:

1. Express your apology
2. Give suggestions and reasons for not making the appointment

Please note: The word count should be around 100 words.

The introduction and ending are given and are not included into the word count.

The word count of 100 words for the NCEE English writing was regarded as too low by some of the participants. The Chinese participants feel challenged when they attended foundation programmes where they were asked to write essays for questions and assignments which may require around a thousand words.

The lack of knowledge around writing seems, at least in part, to be caused by the lack of focus on English writing at high school level. Even if some students had taken IELTS and practised IELTS English writing, the writing is still very different to the academic writing they encountered in the foundation programme and undergraduate studies (Aish & Tomlinson, 2012). The sharp rise in word count has the participants feeling overwhelmed; when they were describing meeting the word count in the foundation programme and undergraduate essays, words like ‘make-up’, ‘find’, ‘copy’, ‘fill-in’ were used to describe their process of completion instead of ‘writing’.

According to the curriculum of middle and high school writing (People's Republic of China Ministry of Education, 2011, 2017), topics that the students are asked to write are normally writing a letter or email to an acquaintance, introducing a place or person, describing a person, and writing about events that happened in a day. Though most of the participants did not participate in NCEE, they felt the topic of high school writing was not challenging at all. The leap from writing a reply email to a discussion of the Treaty of Waitangi (a foundation level essay in a Private Education Institution in New Zealand) had the students baffled. The lack of focus and depth in writing is what the Chinese foreign language teaching sector has been trying to improve over the years (Dello-Iacovo,

2009), yet despite these efforts it is apparent students are still overwhelmed when they encounter essays and academic writing.

International schools in China seem to aim at preparing students for their future studies in the Western world. They normally co-operate with foreign institutions, for instance Maple International school in Dalian (Canada) and The Second High School attached to Beijing Normal University (U.S.A) provide a language environment which facilitates students' acquisition of language. Moreover, students encounter task-based writing and essay writing earlier than public high school students. It seems the better way for students to prepare for their studies abroad is to attend to these programmes instead of public schooling. This conjecture is supported by feedback from the participants who attended international high schools in China. The main features and differences between public and international high schools are summarised in Figure 3 below.

Regular High school	International High school
More emphasis on NCEE scoring, less emphasis on English writing and speaking, concentration on reading comprehension and multiple choice questions.	No emphasis on NCEE scoring, more emphasis on students' success in English speaking and writing.
Wording requirement for writing is low, normally no more than 150 words.	Wording requirements imitates the western high schools, research essays may reach to 1000 words
Writing is limited to letters, emails, basic narratives, etc.	Research essays and task writing assignments are commonly required by foreign teachers.

Figure 3. The difference in English writing between Public high schools and international high schools. Summarized by the author.

Over-reliance on formulaic writing

Due to the low percentage of writing in exams, teachers did not invest much energy in teaching students English writing structures. Instead, they used a more efficient method for higher exam scores – modelling (Guan, 2011).

Students are asked to memorize selected models and structures, designed to give high scores. Some of these models are obtained from local seminars and meetings where English teachers are asked to participate. But most of the teachers base these models on previous high scoring writings picked out of NCEE or Zhongkao exams.

范文:

Dear Jim,

I'm sorry that I won't be able to go hiking with you this Saturday .

I began to cough yesterday morning , so I went to see a doctor . She told me it was a bad cold , and I would have to stay at home for a few days .

I'd really like to spend some time with you . Is it OK with you if we take a trip to Zhangjiakou next Saturday? It's one of the host cities for the 2022 Winter Olympics . Please let me know what you think .

Again, I'm very sorry abot the inconvenience.
Hope to hear from you soon.

Yours
Li hua

Figure 4. Example from Marking key of Beijing NCEE English exam

Figure 4 is the official marking key given out to students about two months after NCEE. An example like this is normally written by the marking committee. Then the teachers would often use them to explain and share the secret of the high scoring writing and would ask students to memorise these texts. Numerous passages covering various topics and genres are selected from different years and provinces for students to memorize. After memorizing them, students will then use whichever suits the required topic best in their exams.

Furthermore, a certain formula was introduced to students to complete tasks that did not fit the models. By using certain fixed sentences or word phrases at the appropriate place, students only need to attempt to express themselves in a very limited fashion in order to guarantee an average score in the writing part.

写作 套路	回应对方、承接话题（点明写信用意和主题）→续写话题（将话题展开，逐层说清）→寒暄结尾（送去祝愿或表达希望达到的写信目的）
注意 事项	考生心中要始终装有收信对象；明确写信的用意；围绕主题组织材料，做到条理清楚、言辞得体；注意人称、时态呼应一致
写作 参考	开头语：(1) I'm writing to... (2) Glad to hear that..., so I'm writing the letter...and I hope... 结束语：(1) I'm looking forward to hearing from you soon. (2) I hope all above can be helpful and wish you... (3) Please do me the favor to... (4) I would appreciate it if you are so kind to...

●模板范文：

Dear Jane,

Glad to hear from you and you're welcome to China in July（回应对方）. The following are some Chinese customs（总说话题）.

Firstly, _____. Secondly, _____. Next, _____. Finally, _____.

Anyhow, different cultures, different customs. If you "Do as the Romans do when in Rome", you'll enjoy more of your stay here.（分说话题，条理清楚）

I hope what's mentioned above might be helpful and wish you a good journey.（结束话题）

Yours sincerely,
Li Hua

Figure 5. Model of English writing.

Figure 5 (Xie, 2010) indicates what the students need to note when writing a letter. The first row provides students with the writing formula, first respond to the person then pick up the topic, continue the topic, greetings and ending. The second row is asking students to be aware of tenses, word choices and other writing mistakes. The third row provides students with commonly used word phrases and sentences in exams. Then a template or model is provided for students to memorize and use in their future exams. It is somewhat ironic that the sentence "Glad to hear ...in July" is grammatically incorrect.

5.3 The students regarded the ability to write good academic English essential for their success in undergraduate studies.

According to the findings, most of the students regard academic writing skills as the key to obtaining good marks in their studies, as writing remains the most widely used way to evaluate students' performance (Tran, 2014). The anxiety of students writing their individual written assignments as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is mainly due to their lack of academic writing experience. Also, other factors like disciplinary knowledge and meeting the academic writing criteria play a role. It is clear that the writing challenges caused most of the participants significant anxiety as they all were very aware that their ability to write well was vital for a good academic performance.

The following are the challenges students are mostly concerned about in their academic writing.

Academic vocabulary and disciplinary knowledge

A frequent issue mentioned in the interviews is students' concern that their vocabulary is too limited for the demands of the writing tasks they have to complete. They feel they need much more vocabulary to complete their essay tasks, not only academic words but also disciplinary vocabulary. Most of the students found the process challenging and as a result, some of the participants revealed that they would turn to translating tools such as Google Translate, to assist them to complete their assignments. A study carried out by Tsai (2020) indicates that the use of Google Translate does enhance students' performance in writing. The students were able to write longer essays with more academic words. However, overdependence on such methods would impact students writing ability in the long term. Kol et al. (2018) argue that while students are exposed to academic vocabulary when they use Google Translate it is unlikely that encountering words in this way will prove particularly beneficial. It is unlikely that this approach will facilitate the growth of students' productive vocabulary.

Referencing

A number of research studies acknowledge that Chinese students' neglect of citations and referencing has led to their inadequate mastery of these skills (Yang & Lin, 2010; Zhang, 2018). All of the interviewed students had been taught referencing on their foundation studies programmes; however, students were still having concerns with referencing. There were also concerns that some programmes required students to know more than APA referencing.

5.4 The participants believed that the pathway programmes in New Zealand have better prepared them to meet the demands of academic writing than the English they learnt in Chinese schools.

All the participants of this research initially took a language course or foundation programme before commencing their undergraduate study. Students acknowledged the importance of the foundation programme for students in their age bracket coming to New Zealand. The process is aimed at providing them not only with an environment in which they could improve their general language proficiency but also partially equipping them to cope with the academic demands of university study (Bruce, 2017). They felt the foundation programme had a positive impact on their later studies.

Students believed the foundation programme was like a buffering zone for them to eliminate some of the obstacles that might impede their study (V. J. Zhang, 2013). Two issues were frequently raised. The period spent in foundation studies allowed them to improve their overall language proficiency which made it easier for them to cope with the English they encountered in their undergraduate classes. In addition the time they spent on the foundation studies programmes allowed them an opportunity to adapt to the Western education mode (Dooey, 2010). Hence all participants asserted that attending a language course or foundation programme was a good transitory period to acquire language proficiency and, at the same time, adapt themselves to the New Zealand education system. Immersion in an English environment allowed students to absorb and acquire the language quicker than in China where such immersion was not possible, however, the pathway programmes do not seem to have provided sufficient

instruction or practice on academic literacy (Benzie, 2011).

5.5 Students' ability to communicate successfully in writing at undergraduate level is compromised by ambiguous instructions regarding the composition of assignments and/or their own failure to comprehend these instructions

One of the most significant problems concerning foundation studies programmes that the participants raised was that, despite the fact that all classes were conducted in English they still did not have enough opportunity to practise communicating in the language (Dooey, 2010). The participants said that there were always sufficient Chinese students in the class to make it quite possible for them to use Chinese to communicate instead of English. They used these classes as a safe haven in which they could be quiet and remained relatively inactive.

Later in their university classes they followed the same pattern, and they seldom questioned their lecturers about their assignment requirements. This lack of communication led many of the participants of this study to fail to comprehend what they were expected to write (Bian & Wang, 2016). Instead of seeking help from their lecturers or student learning centres they use translating tools to understand the requirements in their mother tongue or they sought help from peers who believed they understood the requirements.

The participants believe that a given example or model of what they are expected to write from the lecturers is helpful for students to understand the writing requirements better. In addition, giving feedback on the students' draft essays is also viewed as an effective method for students to comprehend what aspects they ought to improve on in their essays and how they could achieve a higher score in assignments (Xiang, 2004; Yu & Lee, 2016).

5.6 Summary

This chapter discussed the findings presented in Chapter 4. There are a number of factors that Chinese students believe have influenced their ability to use academic English. Their prior English learning experience in China has been very influential. The study suggests that the current teaching methods and classroom practices in China do not seem to facilitate students' communicative skills both in writing and speaking. It has also been suggested that Chinese international high schools better prepare students than the public high schools. In the same vein foundation studies programmes appear to provide a useful introduction to academic studies. The study has also highlighted the importance of providing students with clear guidelines for assignments, and the need to ensure that students understand the assignment briefs. It also appears that tutorials about assignments are very useful.

The final chapter briefly summarises the study findings and provides suggestions aimed at improving the preparation of these students for academic study.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate the difficulties Chinese students are facing writing academic English at undergraduate level. The research questions were designed to reveal the impact of the English instruction they received during their schooling experience in China, as well as the contribution made by the foundation studies programmes they enrolled in. It was hoped that this would contribute to a better understanding of the challenges they face. A better understanding of these challenges will help in the development of solutions.

6.2 Brief summary of findings

In the Literature Review chapter, it was argued that a deeper understanding of students' challenges necessitates a focus on the student as a whole, not just on the texts produced by the student. Although China's English teaching methods have relied heavily on education theories from Western countries since the foundation of the PRC, there has been a great reliance on teaching methods which are now considered outdated in the Western world. These include approaches such as the Grammar Translation method and Audiolingual approach. A probable reason for this is that these methods often deliver good examination results although they are not currently considered to be the best way to improve students' ability to communicate. Furthermore, the lack of focus on English writing is clearly displayed in the mark distribution of the NCEE and Zhongkao. This means that students often neglect this skill to their detriment when they embark on tertiary studies in English medium universities.

The cultural differences between Western and Chinese education systems have also impacted students' acquisition of language. The Confucian classroom practice is teacher-centred, and students are expected to show respect by being quiet in class. This has contributed to Chinese students' image as 'quiet learners' in New Zealand. Teacher-

centred classrooms do not facilitate students' communicative skills as they have few spontaneous opportunities to use the language in class or practise their spoken English. In addition, the pressure on teachers to assure students' success in examinations has also narrowed the chances of students practising communicative skills. The large class size in China also contributes to the limited chances for students to engage in effective practice of communicative skills with their teachers and peers.

Their previous English learning experience in Chinese schools did not seem to have prepared the students to meet the demands of academic writing at undergraduate level. Despite the large time input into English learning, the focus was mainly on obtaining higher scores, and students' ability to improve general communicative skills seems to have suffered as a result. English writing relied heavily on following models given by teachers and students are accustomed to following certain steps and procedures when writing in English.

The examination system in China only required the writing of very short texts and encouraged the use of formulaic writing, where students follow the models and structures designed to give good scores. This practice also limits students' ability to express themselves in writing. The huge leap of writing practice from China to New Zealand was revealed by the participants of this study.

The interviewees of this study all attended pathway foundation programmes before entering their undergraduate level studies. They are divided into three groups, the first two groups either wanted to avoid fierce NCEE competition or did not achieve ideal scores in the NCEE, and the last group attended international high school which aimed at preparing students who wished to study abroad after high school. Despite their differing backgrounds all the participants acknowledged the importance of foundation programme studies which they believed prepared them better for undergraduate studies, especially as far as writing is concerned. The participants believed that the pathway programmes in New Zealand have better prepared them to meet the demands of academic writing than the English they learnt in Chinese schools. Students acknowledged that pathway programmes and language studies served as a buffering zone and transition period for

them to adapt to the New Zealand study mode, and the knowledge taught in pathway programmes is more helpful to students' study at undergraduate level.

Writing ability is regarded as paramount for undergraduate students to succeed in their studies and the foundation programme focused on students' written more than spoken English. However, this study revealed that, even though they passed foundation programmes before enrolling for undergraduate studies, the participants are still not clear as to what they are supposed to write and are reluctant to communicate with their lecturers. The Confucian classroom practice in China (mentioned in 5.2.1) may have contributed to their lack of communication, however, the foundation programme studies did not seem to focus on their spoken English as much as they expected.

Two main concerns were raised by the interviewees, one aspect is their lack of academic and disciplinary vocabulary. The other was that they lacked general communicative skills. This was because both the Chinese schools and the foundation programmes did not appear to place much emphasis on these skills. As a result, students claim that they are not able to clear up misunderstandings about writing requirements with lecturers. This may have led to their lower performances in essay writing and task completion. Students' ability to communicate successfully in writing at undergraduate level is also compromised by ambiguous instructions regarding composition of assignments or their failure to comprehend such instructions.

Other writing related issues were identified by the participants. The lack of disciplinary and academic vocabulary has led Chinese students frequently to turn to tools like Google Translate or other translation tools, as their exposure to English did not facilitate their vocabulary growth fast enough to cope with their current studies. Referencing skills were thoroughly taught at foundation studies, APA 7th was the format they are asked to master; however, for students entering science related majors, only mastering APA 7th was not enough.

6.3 Recommendations

The number of Chinese graduates suggests that they have the potential to succeed in their undergraduate studies, however this study has revealed that the road to success for Chinese students in New Zealand can be made easier. Hence, the following recommendations are made. It is acknowledged that the first three recommendations can only be implemented by the Chinese Ministry of Education. The last two however, might be helpful in the New Zealand context.

1. The Chinese Education Ministry and related departments should continue implementing the shift of teaching methods to a more communicative task-based approach. A shift from focus-on-formS to focus-on-form might also facilitate student acquisition of English. In addition, the ministry should consider reassigning the marks allocated to the difference sections of English in current examinations. Placing more emphasis on speaking and writing would motivate both students and teachers to pay more attention to these skills.
2. The schools in China should improve the quality of foreign language teaching. In order to achieve this the examination system should focus more on communicative competence. If this were done teachers would need to employ a communicative approach if they wanted their students to do well in the exams. In addition, an attempt should be made to attract teachers with greater communicative competence in order to facilitate the use of more authentic English in class to encourage communication among students.
3. The Chinese institutions should continue to strengthen their cooperation with foreign universities, and in addition foundation programmes should be established at high school level to allow those students who wish to study abroad more time to prepare for the challenges they will face at undergraduate level. These high school programmes should be linked to overseas foundation programmes. This will ensure that the content offered will be useful for the students' future studies.
4. The New Zealand Pathway foundation programmes should balance the focus on

general communicative skills, not only training students with knowledge around academic writing but also aim at improving their spoken English and their attitude towards class interaction. Such measures would ensure students entering undergraduate level have the courage, and the necessary skills, to talk to their lecturers and peers if they have any uncertainty about their assignments.

5. If possible, undergraduate lecturers should provide more feedback on draft essays. This would help students recognise aspects they need to focus on. The lecturer would need to invest more energy into giving students feedback, but such input is more efficient than explaining the writing instructions multiple times and pushing back deadlines in order to allow students to complete assignments where they are uncertain as to what is required of them.

6.4 Limitations of the study

The number and composition of the participants in this study is a limitation. Only 15 students were interviewed, and they all come from the age group 18 to 23. Older students might well have very different perspectives. Although an attempt was made to cover as many discipline areas as possible, coverage was still limited. Students were only drawn from four different tertiary institutions based in Auckland, New Zealand. In addition, as noted in the study, China is addressing the English education of the students as a matter of priority. Some of the students in this group had left Chinese schools four to five years before they were interviewed. Their responses might not accurately reflect the current situation in China. Hence, it would be worthy to conduct a longitudinal study tracking different Chinese students from different age groups who have clearly received different English teaching in China.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Ethics Approval.



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

14 April 2021

Pat Strauss
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Pat

Re Ethics Application: **21/64 The perceptions of mainland undergraduate Chinese students of the effect of English instruction in Chinese schools on their ability to write academic English**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 14 April 2024.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Please provide the location of post-analysis data storage once you have moved into your new office.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: redsnow_rain@163.com

Appendix B. Advertisement for Participants.



TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

Invitation to Participate in a Research

邀请您参与研究项目

Project Title 项目名称:

The perceptions of mainland undergraduate Chinese students of the effect of English instruction in Chinese schools on their ability to write academic English

中国大陆本科生对中文学校英语教学对他们学术英语能力的影响的看法

Dear UG mainland Chinese students 亲爱的 AUT 本科中国大陆学生,

Pat Strauss and Yinghan Zhu would like to invite you to participate in a research project. We are eager to hear your perceptions of your prior English learning experience in China and how it has influenced your academic writing abilities. You are a Chinese speaking student who received all, or most of your education in China, and came to NZ to enrol on an undergraduate degree. We believe that it would be better if you are NOT currently one of Pat's students. Pat Strauss is an associate professor in the School of Language and Culture and Yinghan Zhu is a master's students of Language and Culture.

Pat Strauss 和 Yinghan 邀请您参加一项研究项目。我们渴望能够听到你的看法, 关于你在中国英语学习的经历和它如何影响到你学术性写作能力。你是一名中国学生, 在新西兰录取之前所有或者大部分的教育实在大陆完成的。并且最好你目前不是 Pat 的学生。

Purpose of this research

研究的目的

Currently preparation in China for students Chinese to study abroad at EMI institutions is limited to English lessons to prepare them for IELTS and other forms of entrance examinations. A mainland Chinese student graduating from high school will have spent a considerable period of time learning English. In this study we wish to investigate the influence of this formidable investment of time and resources on students' ability to write acceptable academic English. We hope to gain a greater understanding of Mainland Chinese students' understanding of the academic writing which they are about to encounter. This study aims to contribute to a greater understanding of how mainland Chinese students' English studies both help and hinder their academic writing ability.

目前, 在中国为中国学生在出国留学前的准备工作仅限于英语课程, 以帮助他们通过雅思和其他形式的入学考试。一名中国大陆的高中毕业生花费了相当长的时间学习英语。在这项研究中, 我们希望能够进一步了解大陆学生对他们即将遇到的学术写作的理解以及中国大陆学生应该如何在出国前为学术写作做好更好的准备。这项研究希望能更好地了解中国大陆学生的英语学习以及如何帮助提高他们的学术写作能力。

Your perceptions would assist us in understanding why and how the academic writing challenges have been developed, and it would give great insights on how the institutions can help Chinese students on academic writing trainings and teaching. Furthermore, we hope to develop a programme in China to help students who are going to study abroad and prepare them better for academic literacy in the future.

你的认知将会帮助我们理解为何学生们会遇到学术性写作的问题, 问题是怎样形成的, 并且还会帮助机构们更清楚的了解在日后更好的帮助中国学生。另外, 我们希望能够在中国开设相应的项目来帮助未来希望出国留学的中国学生, 帮助他们克服学术性写作的难题。

Please contact Yinghan Zhu 请联系: email: yinghan8114@gmail.com Phone no. 0272893694

Wechat 微信: zhuyinghan

Appendix C. Participants Interview Information Sheet.


TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

Participant Information Sheet

参与者咨询页

Undergraduate Chinese students
在读本科中国学生

Date Information Sheet Produced:
咨询页日期:
15 March 2021

Project Title 项目名称:
The perceptions of mainland undergraduate Chinese students of the effect of English instruction in Chinese schools on their ability to write academic English
中国大陆本科生对中文学校英语教学对他们学术英语能力的影响的看法

An Invitation
邀请

Pat Strauss and Yinghan Zhu would like to invite you to participate in a research project. We are eager to hear your perceptions of your prior English learning experience in China and how it has influenced your academic writing abilities. Pat Strauss is an associate professor in the School of Language and Culture and Yinghan Zhu is a master's students in the School of Language and Culture.

Pat Strauss 和 Yinghan 盛情邀请你参加此研究项目。我们渴望能够听取到你们对你们在中国时英语学习经历的见解和观点, 以及这些经历如何影响到你们目前的学术性写作的能力。Pat Strauss 是语言与文化学院的讲师, Yinghan 是学院的在校硕士研究生。

What is the purpose of this research?
此研究项目的目的是什么?

Mainland Chinese students often opt to study at institutions where English is the medium of instruction. Currently preparation in China for students to study abroad at EMI institutions is limited to English lessons to prepare them for IELTS and other forms of entrance examinations. A mainland Chinese student graduating from high school will have spent a considerable period of time learning English. In this study we wish to investigate the influence of the time and effort you spent learning English at school on your ability to write acceptable academic English. We hope to gain a greater understanding of Mainland Chinese students' understanding of the academic writing which they are about to encounter. This study aims to contribute to a greater understanding of how mainland Chinese students' English studies both help and hinder their academic writing ability.

This research will also enable Yinghan to obtain his Master's degree. In addition, the findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations.

中国大陆学生通常选择在以英语为教学语言的院校学习。目前, 在中国为中国学生在出国留学前的准备工作仅限于英语课程, 以帮助他们通过雅思和其他形式的入学考试。一名中国大陆的高中毕业生花费了相当长的时间学习英语。在这项研究中, 我们希望能够进一步了解大陆学生对他们即将遇到的学术写作的理解以及中国大陆学生应该如何在出国前为学术写作做好更好的准备。这项研究希望能更好地了解中国大陆学生的英语学习以及如何帮助提高他们的学术写作能力。

这项研究会帮助 Yinghan 获得硕士学位。研究的结果也可用于学术出版物和演讲。

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?
为什么邀请我参加此研究项目?

16 June 2022 page 1 of 4 This version was edited in November 2019

You have responded to information passed on to you by friends or posted on noticeboards. You are a Chinese speaking student who received all, or most of your education in China, and came to NZ to enrol on an undergraduate degree. We believe that it would be better if you are NOT currently one of Pat's students.

你回应了朋友的给你传递的信息，或者在通知橱窗看到了此邀请。你是一名中国学生，在新西兰录取之前所有或者大部分的教育实在大陆完成的。并且最好你目前不是 Pat 的学生。

How do I agree to participate in this research?

我如何同意参加此研究项目？

Please contact Yinghan via yinghan8114@gmail.com to express your willingness to participate in the research, your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

请直接联系 Yinghan yinghan8114@gmail.com，明确表达参加此项目的意愿。这完全是一次自愿的活动：您是否参与完全取决于您的选择，您的选择（参与与否）将不会对您有任何影响，对于您将来的学习也不会有任何影响。同时，在参与其间，您完全可以选择在任何时候退出本项研究。如果您选择退出本项研究的话，您将可以选择让研究人员删除任何可识别出您的数据或者选择允许这些数据继续被用于本项研究。然而，一旦研究的结果出来了，有关您的数据就可能无法再被删除。

What will happen in this research?

研究项目过程中会发生什么？

Yinghan would like to have an interview with you, at a place and time of your convenience. This interview can also take place online if you prefer. The interview will be conducted in Mandarin. The interview questions will be about your prior schooling experience in China, and the interview will be audio recorded, and in the process, notes might be taken by Yinghan. After the interview a transcript of the interview in Chinese will be sent to you for your confirmation. You have the right to make any changes to the transcript or you may decide that you do not want to have it used at all. If you decide that you would prefer to be interviewed online the consent form will be emailed to you. You will need to return the completed form to Yinghan before your data can be used.

我们将会与你进行一个采访，你可以选择合适的时间和地点。任何在线访谈方式也可以。采访将会用中文进行。采访内容是关于你在中国的学习经历，整个采访将会被录音，过程中 Yinghan 可能会做文字记录。采访结束后，内容将会被转换成文字，你有权通过邮件方式更改你访谈的内容。如果你决定在线参加采访，所有的表格将会通过邮件发送给你。在采访数据使用之前你需要将表格填好签字并发回给 Yinghan。

What are the discomforts and risks?

此研究项目有什么不适或者风险？

We do not envisage that there will be any discomfort. Yinghan has similar experiences, and he has taught in China for years. He is able to understand the challenges you faced, and you are facing right now. Your sharing would help us find ways to prepare students in the future.

You have the right to refuse to answer any questions during the interview and you can withdraw at any stage.

我们没有展望到会有任何的不舒适度。Yinghan 于你有着相似的经历，他在中国有着多年的教学经验，他能够充分理解你以前和目前正在面临的挑战和困难。你的分享将会帮助我们寻找到如何在将来更好的帮助学生。

访谈过程中，你有权拒绝回答任何问题并且可以在任何阶段放弃参与此项目。

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

Not applicable.

无。

What are the benefits?

此研究项目有什么价值？

Your perceptions would assist us in understanding the academic writing challenges Chinese students face. It could also prove useful for Chinese institutions seeking to better prepare their students for study at English medium tertiary institutions. However, there will be no immediate benefit for you.

你的认知将会帮助我们理解为何学生们会遇到学术性写作的问题。也会有助于中国的机构在日后更有效的帮助希望在英语大学学习的中国留学生们。然后，此项目对你并没有直接的收益。

How will my privacy be protected?

如何保护我的隐私？

You will be given a codename e.g., S1. The institution at which you are studying will not be given, and there will only be a broad indication of your direction of study e.g., humanities. The findings will focus on patterns and trends that emerge in the research. However, there is always a possibility that you could be identified.

你将会被给予一个代号，例如 S1。你正在学习的机构名称不会被暴露，相应的我们只会提及你学习的方向，例如人文。结论将注重于出现的趋势和特征，所以我们的访谈重点是你的经历，以及访谈过程中出现的趋势和特征。但，你被识别出来的可能性不是零。

What are the costs of participating in this research?

此研究项目中，我需要投入什么？

The only cost is your time, our interview may take 30 to 45 minutes, and reading and confirming the transcript may take 30 minutes.

唯一需要投入的就是你宝贵的时间，访谈可能需要 30 到 45 分钟，阅读采访的文稿可能需要 30 分钟。

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

如果有意愿参加，我有多久考虑时间？

You will have 15 days to consider and confirm your willingness to participate in our research.

你有 15 天时间去考虑是否有意愿参加此研究项目。

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

我是否会收到此研究项目的结果？

Once the research has been completed, there will be a summary of the findings sent to you. In addition, if an article is published, the details will also be sent to you.

研究完成后，你将会收到一份研究项目的概要。此外，如果研究项目作为学术文章在期刊发表，你会收到相关的信息。

What do I do if I have concerns about this research? 如果我对研究项目有担忧，我该怎么办？

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Pat Strauss pat.strauss@aut.ac.nz extension 6847.

任何对这项研究的担忧，请第一时间联系本项研究的负责人：

Pat Strauss 邮件地址：pat.strauss@aut.ac.nz 联系电话：(+649) 9219999 转 6847

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 extension 6038.

如何您对于研究过程中的任何行为有担忧的话，请通知 AUT Ethics Committee (AUT 伦理行为准则委员会)，邮箱地址为 ethics@aut.ac.nz，联系电话为 (+649) 921 9999 转 6038。

Whom do I contact for further information about this research? 如果我想知道更多资讯应该联系谁?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

请保留此资讯书的副本，方便之后联系查询。同时您也可以通过以下方式联系研究团队:

Researcher Contact Details:

研究员联系方式:

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

请保留此资讯书的副本，方便之后联系查询。同时您也可以通过以下方式联系研究团队:

Pat Strauss 邮件地址: pat.strauss@aut.ac.nz 联系电话: (+649) 9219999 转 6847

Yinghan Zhu 邮件地址: dhg3975@autuni.ac.nz 联系电话: 0272893694

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

研究项目负责人联系方式:

Pat Strauss 邮件地址: pat.strauss@aut.ac.nz 联系电话: (+649) 9219999 转 6847

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 14/04/2021 AUTEK Reference number 21/64

于 2021 年 4 月 14 日经奥克兰理工大学伦理行为准则委员会批准。AUTEK 编号: 21/64

Appendix D. Consent Form for Interviews.



Consent Form

For use when interviews are involved.

Project title: *The perceptions of mainland undergraduate Chinese students of the effect of English instruction in Chinese schools on their ability to write academic English*

项目名称: 中国大陆本科生对中文学校英语教学对他们学术英语能力的影响的看法

Project Supervisor: *Pat Strauss*

项目负责人:

Researcher: *Pat Strauss, Yinghan Zhu*

研究人员:

☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 15/03/2021.

本人已阅读并理解 2021 年 3 月 15 日的表格提供的相关信息以及研究项目信息。

☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

本人得到提问的机会并且已经得到相应的回答。

☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed in both English and Mandarin.

本人理解此访谈期间所有谈话内容将会被录音，并且会被转换成文字（英文和中文）。

☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

本人知道参见此研究项目是完全自愿的（本人的选择）并且本人知道如果有任何对本人有任何不利情况本人可以随时无条件退出此研究项目。

☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

本人了解如果本人选择退出此研究项目，本人有权让研究人员删除任何与本人相关的数据，或者允许研究人员继续使用相关数据。然而，本人也了解研究成果已经产出，有关本人的数据无法被删除。

☐ I agree to take part in this research.

本人同意参加此研究项目。

☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐
我希望收到此研究的结果概要（请选择）： 是 ☐ 否 ☐

Participant's name 参与者姓名:

Participant's signature 参与者签名:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate) 参与者联系方式（如可提供）:

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.....

Date 日期:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 14/04/2021 AUTECH Reference number 21/64
于 2021 年 4 月 14 日经奥克兰理工大学伦理行为准则委员会批准。AUTECH 编号: 21/64

Appendix E Questions Outline for Interviews

Interview Questions

1. What is your current study direction? E.g., science, engineering, education
2. Why did you choose to study at an EMI institution?
3. Where did you go to school in China?
4. How well do you think you were prepared before coming to NZ?
5. How were you prepared for English? Especially written English
6. How did you feel when you encountered with actual written assignments in NZ?
7. In which ways did the preparation in China prepare/ not prepare you for these assignments?
8. How do you think you might have been better prepared? In which particular ways?
9. How useful was your schooling experience for your studies?
10. Compared to your schooling experience, were IELTS preparation and/ or Foundation studies more helpful?
11. What are your suggestions/comments concerning this topic?