Does English Camp Open Doors? A Study of Migrant Students' Motivation, Imagined Community, and Identity

Hong Zhang
Dulwich College Suzhou, China

Abstract

In the era of urbanization in China, the massive internal migrant children population has become a significant group in host cities' education provision. However, due to reasons presented, it cannot be ignored that migrant children's English competence has lagged behind their city peers. The purpose of this research is to evaluate an intensive English programme called English Camp for internal migrant children in China by using the framework of social cultural theory. By analyzing 31 participants' personal narrative stories, five focal students' in-depth interviews, classroom observation, discussion with teaching assistants (TAs) and one founder, migrant children's identities are explored, as well as their imagined communities and motivation. It was found that their identities were multi-faceted, deeply rooted in the macro context and articulated with the micro level interaction in the end. The results showed the overall positive effect of English Camp. The welcoming and intercultural environment helps migrant children visualize their future more broadly. Some practical implications are also suggested to educators.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Over the past decades, astonishing urbanization in China has led to massive internal immigration of farmers to metropolises in pursuit of a better life. The data from the Chinese National Bureau in 2018 showed that there were over 286 million rural to urban migrant workers. According to the definition from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), "migrant" refers to those farmers who work and settle down in cities but without local household residency (hukou). Based on the census in 2010, it is estimated by the China Women's Federation that the number of children moving with their migrant parents had reached approximately 35 million. There is no denying that these migrant children have

Email: echo.zhang@dulwich.org

become a significant group in host cities' education provision; their education has captured considerable attention from policy makers, scholars, and the public.

Compared with their local peers, migrant students on average have a higher dropout rate in education. These students are more likely to be stigmatised. They can be very sensitive and give up on themselves (Xiong, 2021). Another index that the migrant students lag behind is their academic achievement, especially in English learning (Li & Ren, 2015; Lu & Zhou, 2013; Tang, 2019). The issue of an English competence gap has been a concern in educational circles in modern China.

Factors contributing to the English competence achievement gap are complex - there are contextual and individual reasons. A lack of English learning motivation is one salient element (e.g. Portes & Hao, 2004). Shao (2019) found that many migrant children hold negative attitudes towards English learning as they see no short term usefulness in daily life. Gao (2014) reviewed studies on Chinese learners' English learning motivation and their parents' social backgrounds, he found that "investment from parents from the upper and upper-middle classes had more positive effects on their children's English-learning motivation than did the investment of the lower-class parents". In China, students' English scores have played a prominent part in gaining admission to senior high school and universities. However, a migrant students' self-expectation survey in Beijing (Wang & Yang, 2009) found that only 5 to 10% of sampled students showed aspiration to go to college, and up to 80% of them wanted to work after junior high school.

In order to motivate migrant students' English learning, an intensive English programme called "English Camp" founded by one non-profit organization has been held annually in Suzhou since 2008. English Camp is a partnership project between a local private migrant school and a charity. I volunteered with administrative work in their 2019 summer programme. English Camp is open to migrant children from that school and is entirely free for them. It offers one week of intensive teaching in the summer. Besides English instruction, English Camp also provides original English story books, lunch, uniforms, and portfolios as material resources. Inspired by a ubiquitous saying "English opens many doors for you" meaning that English broadens English learners' economic opportunities, English Camp pursues the goal to, "open doors of motivation to learn English".

1.2 Aims of the research

However, can this intensive English Camp really open doors? Evaluating the enactment of this programme is necessary, especially in the context of migrant children. Leading the shift from a relaxed situation to engaging successfully is a crucial element to reducing the achievement gap and ultimately realizing educational equity. Tracking down the key successful factors helps policymakers and educators to implement them in schools or replicate them in more programmes.

The major impetus of this study was a desire to investigate what kind of identity these migrant students take up in an emerging intensive English programme with all foreign teachers, and how these identities influence their attitude towards English learning and motivation. The theoretical framework used in this research is social cultural theory, which views language learning as not merely an individual learning process but also a cultural and social challenge since the learners need to assimilate into this learning environment. In the past few decades, identity has increasingly been recognised as a central analytic lens in language education. There is a sizeable body of research about English as a second language (ESL), learners' identities and English language learning experiences in schools or courses. Most of them focused on migrants' identity in English-speaking countries' schools or programmes (e.g., McKay & Wong, 1996; Atkinson, 2014; Bartlett & Garcia, 2011; Olsen, 2001; Norton Peirce, 1993). Unlike the diverse social backgrounds of migrants in Anglophone countries, internal immigrants in China still share the same ethnicity with locals. There is a paucity of research into home country contexts. In addition to the local context difference, most of the studies involve identities of adolescents, university students, and adults rather than young children from primary schools.

In this article, students' L2 motivation, imagined community and identity are examined. Across the registered migrant-only school, five students participated in this qualitative study. In highlighting this case study of internal migrant children, the present project adopts instruments including, personal narrative story, interview, observation, and discussion with one programme founder and TAs to triangulate the data collection. The aim of this research project has therefore been to establish what contributes to positive or negative learner identities and motivation. Through analysis, the present research will shed light on implications for academic engagement and language development for this group.

This research is guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1. What kind of the identities do migrant students take up?

RQ 2. What is the range of their imagined communities?

RQ 3. How did the programme influence students' English learning motivation?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Why learner identity

Before laying out the theoretical definitions, it is necessary to understand the reasons for using identity lens and raising the awareness of identity issues in the language learning research. First, it is essential to address the relationship between identity and language learning.

2.1.1 Language learning and identity

The research framework is based on the sociocultural learning perspective. Prior to the dawning of the sociocultural paradigm in the 1990s, the influential stream of theory in second language acquisition (SLA) focused heavily on language learning product or processes. Product-oriented theorists view language learning as learning the formal qualities of language, such as grammatical forms and use. From a process point, scholars such as Gardner (1985) and Oxford (1990) focus language learning on the individual learning process. They emphasize learner differences such as behavior, cognition, and aptitude have the greatest impact on language learning (Gardner, 1985).

Neither a product nor a process-oriented perspective takes the interaction of individuals and the social surrounding context into account. Many researchers (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Lantolf, 2000; Norton, 2000) challenge that the cognitive tradition in SLA has potential pedagogical limitations. Critical theorists like Norton Peirce (1993) questions why learners can speak fluently in some circumstances while remain faltering in others. Characteristics such as introversion and extroversion fall short in explaining the ambivalent act. McMahon (1997) notes that meaningful learning seldom happens merely inside learners' minds as they are not isolated but socially related with other people or societies in the learning environment. These researchers believe that language learning and society are co-constituted. Learners' participation is also affected by the power relationships between interlocutors (Darvin & Norton, 2021). Drawing on these arguments, the current study conceptualised language learning based on sociocultural theory, which has entailed a focus on the influence of society and people in the learning environment on the individual's learning.

Lave and Wenger (1991) coin the term "Community of Practice (COP)" to illustrate learning as practice in a community. Specifically, learning is a process of practicing with more knowledgeable others to gain linguistic and social skills in order to acquire participation into a community. At this point, they put forward the notion of legitimate peripheral participation, which is regarded as an important term in English language education (McGroarty, 1998; Pavlenko, 2000; Peirce, 1995). It demonstrates how novices initially on the periphery of the community are gradually moving towards the central core activities. Language learning has been recognised as an important platform from which teachers can

cultivate a sense of pride in learners' own culture and an acceptance of cultural pluralism (Finocchario & Brumfit, 1983). Language learning can also help learners gain new insights into their own culture (Kramsch, 1993). Thus, learning transforms what we can do and who we are, which is an experience of identity. Sociocultural researchers consider language learning essentially as a social activity contributing to learners' identity formation and mediating their social relationships in particular discourses. Therefore, learning and identity are highly related; some scholars even consider they are inseparable (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991; Norton, 1997). Especially, learning of a second/ foreign language has come to be recognised as a more prominent factor than any other disciplines in identity mediating. In the Chinese context, researchers such as Gao, Cheng, Zhao, and Zhou (2005), and Gao, Li, and Li (2002) reveal that learning English plays an essential role in Chinese learners' identity mediation. Thus, in order to evaluate migrant students' English learning, it is powerful to disclose identities they take up in the summer camp.

2.1.2 Motivation and identity

The turn towards a sociocultural perspective in SLA inevitably has caused paradigm shifts in understanding learning motivation as well (Gao, Zhao, Cheng & Zhou, 2004; Norton & Toohey, 2001). The stereotype of intrinsic/instrumental versus extrinsic/integrative motivation has been questioned. In fact, motivation is concerned more as dynamic and fluid within various local contexts. Gao, Cheng, and Kelly (2008) investigate Chinese mainland students' motivation to join an "English Club" to practice oral English in Hong Kong. The results showed the participation motivation is complex, including community building, personal development, and pursuing higher social status identity. Dörnyei (2009) broadens motivation to a conceptual scheme "L2 Motivation Self System", which consists of three elements: the ideal self, the "ought-to" self, and the learning experience. The ideal self is labelled as the most significant motivator. This system demonstrates that identity is a vital component of motivation. MacIntyre, Mackinnon, and Clement (2009) believe that the identity approach represents an advantageous way to study motivation. This research demonstrates the important role identity plays in motivation and language learning.

2.1.2 Research on identity

Informed by the above literature, it is evidenced by blossoming research, discussed below, that identity is a critical lens with which to understand the complex dynamics of teaching and learning second/ foreign languages. These research findings provide productive implications for curriculum design, classroom practice, and so on. Within this research, "native" versus "non-native" speakers is always a topic of great interest in language education domain. Empirical studies concern immigrants' or international students' identity construction through language learning in host countries within diverse learning contexts, such as workplaces or various institutes. For example, analyzing an immigrant woman, Eva's communication with her Anglophone Canadian coworker in one workplace, Norton Peirce (1993) points out that the position the learners are subjected to closely relates to their motivation. In this case, Eva was positioned as "strange" when her colleague asked her rhetorical questions, which made Eva break off the conversation and end the practice that Eva could have. These studies illustrate the struggles these migrants have in the process of developing their English skills and integrated into the dominant society. Those international students who study abroad in the L2 target countries have expectations of better language learning opportunities and their acculturation experiences. Taking Morita's (2004) project for example, she reports six female Japanese master students' academic learning in a Canadian university. Grounded on Lave and Wenger's (1991) COP theory, she found that students' identities are shaped through the participation, meanwhile, identities also in turn affect their participation. In addition, Howell (2008) conducted a small-scale ethnographic research in a pre-university EAP (English for Academic Purposes) programme in New Zealand. By comparing focal students and academically successful

students' imagined selves and communities, the author concludes that focal students were discouraged by the label of struggling writers at the start of the writing course. However, gradually they developed learning efforts as they accepted the identity of novice writers afforded to them by the instructors.

When labels such as "non-native speakers" are referenced to essentialize and signify the ethnicity of language learners, they are problematic. Similarly, "internal migrants" is no less problematic when it was used to reference language learners' socioeconomics. Of particular concern has been their status in local society and schools, and their classroom practices. It seems like the majority of identity-concerned studies are carried out in L2 domain contexts mainly in North America (Gao & Wright 2020). However, only a small body of research explores identities in home country contexts. These two contexts have significantly different power relations. For instance, in the host countries, the native speakers and non-native speakers' power relationship is more salient. Several researchers (Guo & Gu, 2016; Gu, 2010) gain important findings in investigating students' identities construction in China. Gu (2010) explores four students' discursive strategies through their identity construction. Among them, two informants: Helena and Jane move from the countryside to an urban university. This research is mostly relevant to the internal migrant children's context, since in their home country, these students are more in control in reducing the asymmetric power in L2 target countries.

Identity research either mainly focuses on host contexts, college, or adult learners. It seems that these young internal migrant children's voices have been left out. Scant attention has been paid to hear what these children want to say as the analysis is less straightforward than for older learners. Therefore, this article attempts to document the programme implementation through the migrant students' identity lens to evaluate this English programme.

2.2 Identity and imagined communities

2.2.1 Identity

From a narrow sense of definition, identity stems from a certain group membership, for example, ethnicity, religion, or sports club, which provides social categories. From this position identity is in essence, unitary and fixed. The present study is informed by post-structural identity theory (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Weedon, 1997; Norton, 2013). It extends immediate communities to imagined worlds. Second, these theoretical perspectives hold the underlying assumption that identity is fluid, dynamic and multi-faceted.

Norton (2013) summarizes identity as self-conceptualization as someone "figures out the potential possibilities for the future" (p. 3). As Darvin and Norton (2021) note, motivation is an internal state that learners are willing to learn. However, whether learners are able to take action to learn is greatly affected by the social interactions in different contexts. Norton Peirce (1993) states that in the language education field, if learners consider that in a context (i.e. a conversation, a classroom activity) they would obtain a return (cultural capital) which gives them access to a "hitherto unattainable" community, they would invest a commensurate effort in learning a second language and in other contexts they will not. Investing in language learning is an investment in an individual's social identity per se.

Socioculturalists outline that identity formation "occurs through the construction by the individual with particular subject positions within discourses" (Weedon, 1997: 108). Subjectivity or positioning reflects individual's complex and recurrent interactions with external individual and social contexts; and identity can be "contradictory over historical time and social space" (Weedon, 1997:108). Succinctly put, they basically reflect the most essential feature of identity: identity changes constantly. This is shared with Hawkins (2005), who believed that identity is constructed in a continual negotiation between individual and society. Hall's (1990) opinion also echoes this position. He views identity as multifaceted as well. Different identities are represented selectively as necessary and appropriate.

2.2.2 Imagined communities

Norton Peirce (1993) elaborates the notion of imagined communities with reference to language learning and identity. The process of imagining and reimagining one's multiple memberships has been reckoned to be an important influence on their motivation, investment, and resistance in learning English. Sometimes learners' orientation toward imagined communities arouses even stronger learning engagement and investment (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As Norton (2013) argues, imagined communities are as real as the concrete ones people live in during their daily life. In the study carried out in Hong Kong by Gao, et al. (2008), Chinese mainland students joining the "English Club" to practise communicative English were driven by their imagined community of "Chinese elites" as it is illustrated by one student "a good command of English indicates that I am a Chinese of higher social class".

The misalignment between the actual and ideal self stimulates learners to make concerted efforts to reduce the discrepancy, and ultimately to achieve self-actualization (Dörnyei, 2009). Being aware of learners' imagined communities and imagined identities could promote a teacher's skill to construct some learning activities in which learners can invest more (Norton, 2000). When these ideas are mapped onto learning that happens in English Camp, an understanding of students' needs and their imagined worlds is critical for developing appropriate curriculum or choosing English pedagogy tailored to students with their expectations.

3 Methodology

3.1 Macro context

3.1.1 Education policies in China

First, it is indispensable to note the influence of education policy upon migrant children. Education policy is highly influenced by the political Hukou dual system in China. It constrains the right and eligibility of migrant children without a local Hukou to enroll in public schools. They are asked to pay hefty "out of district" fees or prepare miscellaneous documents and dossier certifications. Even if they are able to pay or accomplish those requirements, there remains uncertainties due to the limited space in public schools. As a result, migrant children either choose to go back to their hometowns to become left-behind children separated from their parents or attend private migrant-only schools.

Beyond compulsory education, another dilemma migrant students face is high school and college entrance exams. They have to go back to their hometown to take exams, which adds another barrier for their further education, due to the fact that the education resources and curriculum are different and disconnected across provinces. This inhibits migrant children not only in their adaptation to local schools if they move from home schools, but also in their familiarity with their hometown system to take entrance examinations.

3.1.2 English teaching in China

Though the development of English teacher quality and teaching approaches in China has come on leaps and bounds, current English teaching still faces issues (Li & Hao, 2009). First of all, driven by the exam-oriented system, teaching evaluation indices are students' exam scores and pass rate. Even though many teachers are aware of meaningful teaching approaches, teachers still stick to a "Cramming method of teaching" as it facilitates reaching desired results quickly. In class, teachers are dominators; students tend to lack the ability to make the language fragment into use. Secondly, teachers' quality varies. Especially acute in rural area or migrant schools, teaching is particularly affected by limited ability in English language such as pronunciation and intonation, pedagogy, and psychology.

3.2 Local context

3.2.1 The research site: one migrant school

English Camp took place every summer from 2008 to 2019 in a local private migrant-only school. The migrant school is in the suburb far from the city centre, located by a mountain. There are 57 classes and 107 teachers. Since the average income offered by the migrant school is much lower than local schools, quite a large proportion of the teachers are migrants too. The school teaches grades one to six, and the students' population is approximately 3,200. Their homes are spread all round Suzhou. As only one bus passes by every half hour, and it shuts down in the afternoon at 6, there are school buses picking up students early in the morning and sending them back home.

Each year, English Camp enrolls approximately 200 migrant students from grade three to grade five. Some students come back year after year, therefore, there are four themes to avoid repetition. All the classes consist of mixed-aged and –ability students. To cater for different needs, teachers are encouraged to modify their instructions and tasks for students building upon their levels. The themes are based on four classic children's books. Pedagogical activities emphasize encouraging learners to speak, and it can be summed up as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which pursues communicative competence. Six classes rotate every day between English, music, art, craft, sports, and games and all link to the theme. Taking this year's theme- family and friends for example, with Audrey Wood's *The Napping House* as reading material, in the English class, students had a task called "create a story" based on *The Napping House*; music class connects this progressive story with songs about people we love.

The curriculum was developed by an expert team in ESL from the States. All teachers voluntarily participated and three quarters of them were well experienced with 15 to 20 years of teaching while some were novice teachers. The teaching assistants recruited were local from one main founder's students, who were studying in a prestigious private high school in Suzhou. They voluntarily joined English Camp and helped with translating key instructions of the foreign teachers for the migrant children, and facilitated classroom tasks.

3.3 Participants

This study adopts a qualitative approach of data collection and analysis. For more sophisticated writing and oral development consideration, participants were drawn from the pool of grade five students, which were 68 in total. As a volunteer in the programme, I had a short writing class for all the grade five students. They were asked to write a personal narrative story after I gave them instructions about the key elements in the narratives and explanation about this research. Flyers about this project and consent forms were sent out to families through the students. In the end, 31 participants were recruited. They were not intentionally selected, for example by successful academic achievement, and participants' grades were highly varied in fact.

From the list of 31 participants, five students and their families were willing to participate in an extended interview to the students and be audio recorded. Grace, Alice, Cassie, Dora, and Sam (pseudonyms) are the main focal students. Sam is the only boy.

During the course, classroom observation was adopted to gain valuable insights with reference to the overall programme nature and patterns. I kept field notes in the three classes I observed. I observed with a "peripheral membership role" (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 380). During my observation I used a low-profile strategy and only interrupted them after they finished group discussion or tasks. Additionally, to triangulate viewpoints, I interviewed one founder of English Camp and discussed with two TAs about students' learning in English Camp. Table 1 illustrates the focal students' basic profile.

Table 1

Focal Students' Profile

Name	Gender	Age	Origin	Age of moving to Suzhou
Dora	Female	12	Anhui, Suzhou	6, Grade 1
Sam	Male	11	Jiangsu, Xvzhou	6, Grade 1
Grace	Female	12	Jiangsu, Xvzhou	Born in Suzhou, but stayed in hometown until 6, Grade 1
Cassie	Female	12	Anhui, Lingbi	Born in Suzhou
Alice	Female	12	Henan, Luogang	6–7, Grade 1

Two of them are from the north part of Jiangsu province, two are from Anhui province, and the other one is from Henan province. All the focal students stayed in their hometowns without parents until the age they needed to go to school.

3.4 Methods and data collection

Data were drawn on the combination of personal narrative stories writing from the participants, semi-structured interviews with five main focal participants, field notes from observation, an interview with the founder, and discussion with two teaching assistants.

Personal narrative story is the first stage of the research. Personal narratives are regarded as a significantly powerful way to disclose writers' identities and the mediators of (re)constructing identities (Vasquez, 2011; Bruner, 1990). By engaging participants voluntarily writing on topics not limited to English learning, but touching on many areas, such as experiences of growing up, interpersonal relationships, future concerns and so on, we can have much insight into how these migrant students see themselves and how they view themselves with respect to others.

After students handed in their personal narrative stories, one-on-one interviews were conducted during the programme. The recorded interviews supply the main data to address the first and second research questions of this study. To elicit students' accounts of their life trajectories and social positions, interviews with a range of open questions were used, which allowed me to apply extension prompts and follow up on unexpected responses.

Interviewing the camp founder and discussions with the TAs were adopted after documenting students' personal narrative stories and interview transcriptions. A set list was used to focus the discussion direction. Discussions yielded multiple perspectives and served to cross-reference the other data. This was particularly helpful to capture the challenges both instructors and students face in the process of teaching and learning in this programme.

3.5 Analysis

Both personal narrative stories and interview transcriptions were conducted in Chinese since using their first language enables them to express their ideas more comfortably and precisely. The selected excerpts were translated into English. To preserve original perspectives and ideology, I paid strict attention to keep the language features, such as, modality and hedges. The initial data analysis began after collecting different sources and assembling the dataset. To gain insights into the data, I read all the manuscripts iteratively, noting down my hypotheses and tagging the salient categories beside the chunks.

The data analysis was grounded in Saldana's (2013) coding manual. The analysis process consists of two coding cycles. The first cycle aims to establish emerged topics inductively, next, deductively combining across the entire dataset in the second cycle.

In the next cycle, to identify and elaborate the relations across the emerged thematic categories from the previous stage, pattern coding was involved. Through collapsing the first cycle codes, and then analyzing, shuffling, and regrouping, certain patterns were developed. For instance, "reticent" is created as a second code with three sets of codes: "marginalised vs. integrated", "grade-oriented", and "pre-adolescent". They connect the previous first round codes.

4 Findings

From the analysis of the triangulated data, students' multiple identities will be categorised into three types, alongside related subcategories. At first, the overall findings are going to be summarised regarding the majority of students. Then, some students' examples are presented to illustrate the commonality and variability amongst the students. The interviews of five focal students will be used to look into their imagined communities and their motivation to learn English. Table 2 is the summary of the dataset.

Table 2

Summary of the Dataset

Methods	Data Collection Period	DATA
Personal narrative stories	During the summer programme	• Written narratives • Around 400 words each • 31 narratives total: 28 in Chinese, 3 in English
Interview with students	End of the summer camp	• One on one interview • Audiotaped and transcribed interviews • 5 interviews total • Average 20 minutes each
Classroom observation	During the summer programme	• Field notes on 3 lessons (2 hours of observation)
Interviews with one founder	End of the summer camp	• Audiotaped and transcribed interviews • 30 minutes total
Discussion with TAs	During the summer programme	• Email messages • Notes or transcripts

4.1 Migrant students' multiple identities

4.1.1 Privileged

The narrative stories from all the participants and focal students' interviews showed that a number of them considered they were "privileged" to have the opportunity to study in English Camp. Unlike some students who resist joining summer camps either because the programmes take their playful summer holiday time or they label them as weak in a certain area, these migrant students showed their desire to attend. First of all, since the access to authentic intercultural practice is rather limited for those children, they cherish the opportunity to learn in English Camp. To enroll in the programme, Alice had asked the classroom teacher in the migrant-only school for permission. Likewise, Grace pointed out that it had been her third time in the summer camp. Sam asserted that his English was "awful", and he requested the classroom teacher to let him enroll as Alice did.

It is also noticeable that some participants believed that it was a privilege to live in Suzhou to study English. Compared with their peers back in their hometowns, they felt lucky to have more access to various sources, such as internet and summer camp. Like Cassie mentioned:

> I think, living in Suzhou is better, it is a big city. There are, smart phones… internet, and you can study on your phone. But in my hometown, it is good in the aspects of environment, and air.

4.1.2 Reticent

It was apparent from observations and students' writings that quite a few of the migrant students tended to be quiet. However, their reticence or non-immediacy in speech cannot be interpreted simply as resistance or Asian culture difference. When I looked into their reports and re-evaluated the field notes recursively, a variety of reasons were revealed, forming the different voices behind the reticence.

Marginalised vs. Integrated

Some students themselves mentioned that they felt "lonely and bored" after school. Participant S2 wrote in his personal narrative story: "At weekends, I can only stay at home. Because there is no friend lives close to me, my weekend is very boring." As mentioned above in the local context information, migrant school's character and location dictate that students are isolated. Furthermore, due to their education predicament, it is demonstrated that the students could not fully integrate into the city either. This is confirmed by most of the interviews of the focal students. Sam said that he had more migrant friends than local friends. Additionally, migrant parents tend to have a full schedule working to support their families. Many children expressed the wish to spend more time with their parents. In the art lesson I observed, a typical painting was of a mountain and sunset, which reflected their rigid routine life.

Participant S2 attributed his silence to his introverted personality. However, he also noted that he felt like talking to acquaintances. The merry time shown in his narrative story showed a contradictory identity, an engaging and active identity:

> My grades are good, and I love studying. I am very happy that I was able to study and play with my classmates every day. But it makes me very painful that we will graduate next year. I do not want to separate with my class. It bothers me every day to think about what will happen after graduation. This is the most worrying thing for me.

In the above excerpt, it illustrates that in fact he is quite engaged in the classroom community where he shares similar social background with classmates. That is the reason why it worried him significantly if he thought about leaving the present school with easygoing socializing. After graduation, he either has to go back to his hometown or tries to go to a local school due to his migrant status. Besides participant S2, many students expressed their affinity to this migrant-only school. Cassie said: "I like this school, teachers here are good: they are very responsive." Sam mentioned that even though his academic performance was not so satisfactory, teachers would still encourage him all the time. S13 wrote in her narrative story: "my teacher helped me overcome the fear, I often go to teachers to ask questions." This integration mirrored in their dreams about future many wanted to be teachers though it was a "tiring position" (in S10's narrative writing). This is contrary to the findings of the research conducted by Yuan et al. (2013), in which migrant students who studied in migrant-only schools were less adapted in school. The paradox is that the migrant-only school is a more easy-going social community but with unsatisfactory education resources.

The marginalised identity decreases their self-esteem and in turn limits their capacity to practice speaking English.

Grade-oriented

In the narrative story writing task, a significant proportion of students mentioned grades. Grades have greatly affected their emotions. Good grades are regarded as students' strengths, which bring them praise and happiness. Conversely, poor marks contribute to negative moods. Sam wrote in his narrative story: "my grades are really poor…I have no strengths, my flaw is my poor learning." However, even good grades never satisfy students. Participants S7 and S12 wrote that they were bitterly disappointed to have lost the chance to get full marks which were so close.

Grades affect not only emotions but also students' social intercourse significantly. Student S2 reported that: "thanks to my good marks, I'm not alienated by classmates." Poor grades hurt Sam's feeling because classmates liked to compare their grades with his.

Similar patterns can be identified in the interviews with focal students. When I asked: "Do you think you are a good learner?" their answers depended on their marks; if they had high marks, they saw themselves as good learners, and vice versa. This is consistent with Li and Hao (2009) who argue that English teaching and learning are heavily driven by the exam-oriented system in China.

This conventional grade-oriented awareness leads to students' concomitant loss of power and satisfaction. Cassie mentioned: "My classmates think I study is well(sic), but I don't think [so]" (In the personal narrative story, original in English). It demonstrates that she did not consider she had achieved desired level as measured by the grades rubrics. Although they may comply with the surrounding contexts, Grace did not conceal her emotions: "I do not like a lot of homework, because they often press me heavily…" (In her personal narrative story).

The hidden grade-oriented practice from society and schools forces students to disguise their feelings and leads to their silence.

Pre-adolescent

There were multiple issues about adults' misunderstanding, for many of the students they were entering adolescence, a time where they grew to shift to independence. The personal narrative story writing appeared to provide them a space to share their feelings as they approached adolescence. For example, Cassie wrote: "I wanted to run away from home" (in her narrative story, originally in English). In the interview, she explained that the reason was she had conflict with parents. S20 claimed in the narrative story: "I'm quiet…I love watching TV shows, adults all think that I'm too small to understand. In fact, children, even though they are still small, they can understand whatever they are interested in." Here, she overtly positioned herself and peers with a grown up identity. Participant S30 legitimated her independent identity: "I have a dream, which accompanied by my growth. My dream may be just a tomfoolery in parents' eyes. This is because they don't understand us… This is me! I want to be myself!" By pointing out that parents hardly understand children, she justified her dream and beliefs. In a vulnerable position, when children's points of view are bound to conflict with adults', they either choose to rebel or stop communicating which is another way of being rebellious.

4.1.3 Interested in communicative language teaching

As mentioned above, many students were quiet, however, that does not represent their passive participation. In fact, the dataset shows that they rather favour communicative teaching. This was corroborated by the end of the programme assembly in the multiple-function hall. All the students and faculties parted with reluctance after watching the video with students' engagement photos in the class. Student S9 wrote: "The pity is that the summer programme is too short, only a week." At the beginning of the programme, they were still unaccustomed to the new study community. As they got familiar, children's laughter often filled the campus from the classrooms. Many students mentioned that they had

a grand time communicating with foreign teachers. For example, Alice stated that "those foreign teachers are especially funny, so are the TAs". They enjoyed the teaching style and teaching content, which were quite distinguishable from their own school, as Alice described: "I love making art crafts in the class and it is interesting to learn words by integrating motions." This is agreed by another focal student, Cassie, who said that, "we never learnt what foreign teachers teach us before" and they are "friendly and approachable".

4.2 Imagined communities

When the students were asked why they came to English Camp, three students (Sam, Cassie, and Alice) answered that their English fundamental knowledge was weak. Sam was influenced by his mother, "my mum thinks that my English is terrible." Two other students (Dora and Grace) showed that they wanted to improve their English. Many of them view learning English is the priority because of its important subject role in schools. For example, Dora said: "I want to collect more English words." This illustrates an imagined community in which they are academically successful. To become successful learners, the migrant students as well as their parents seek educational opportunities such as English Camp. It appeals to them as one means to participate in the imagined community. Also, TAs give migrant children vivid models of fluent English users. As Kanno (2003) pointed out, if disadvantaged children do not see alternative identities, they do not believe that they can be changed.

When I asked them: "Do you like learning English?" it is intriguing that they all responded positively. They highlighted that English will be useful when they travel abroad in future to communicate with foreigners. So far, they do not have the chance to interact with foreigners with English in their life. However, English Camp helps them visualize a future that they could travel abroad and communicate with non-Chinese, which is more privileged than their present status. Though in the globalization era, migrant students may know the importance of English from TV, books or the Internet, in their real lives they have no opportunity to use English. English Camp asserts an example that English is useful not only as a subject but also as a communication tool. Moreover, it elicits students' interest to know other countries and cultures especially countries like the US and the UK. Grace expressed her desire to go to the States: "I would most like to see America…Because American teachers they flew over the Pacific Ocean to come here, I want to go and see the other side of the world, like they did." English Camp teachers gave her a good impression of America: "I think America is greener and has excellent air quality, and people there must be very nice." The second imagined community is a more open world, a perspective which seems to have been formed through English Camp.

5 Discussion and Implications

The findings present the multiple-faceted, changing, sometimes even contrary nature of identity, which is in line with previous studies (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Weedon, 1997; Norton, 2013). As has been illustrated in this study, using a sociocultural perspective to view language learning and identity is useful to analyze students' English learning. English Camp as a learning community implies the overall positive results of facilitating students' access to it. In other words, it helps to form students' legitimate participant identity. There are three prominent aspects that favorably affect informants' identities.

5.1 Dynamic power relations

Traditionally, in order to maintain authority and status, there is an asymmetric power relationship between teachers and students, which is unfavourable for students' voicing in the class. In contrast to the

unequal relation over teachers, English Camp builds up a more open and welcoming community. The dynamic relationship encourages a low anxiety level for students and increased their oral participation. This is aligned with research findings from Gao et al. (2008); the English Club creates space for university students to speak. Moreover, it attracts them to attend regularly not only for the purpose of improving oral fluency, but also to access a community that they desire.

5.2 CLT-oriented curriculum

The data from students demonstrates a clear preference for CLT. The conventional education practices in China are more likely to be textbook-centered, which is driven by the exam-oriented education system. In this system, English is regarded as a crucial school exam subject. To gain high scores, students are cultivated to have "obedient" traits. For instance, they would prefer listening instead of asking questions. The lack of opportunities communicating in English in and out of class limits students' visualization of being users of English. The social construct of communicative teaching is powerful. It strengthens learners' imagination beyond their present contexts as it helps them envision their futures where they use English to communicate more vividly. The imagined identities are not congruent with their current identities, hence, the imagined globalised citizen identity has a profound effect on their learning trajectory and motivation. According to the interview with one founder of English Camp, teachers from the migrant-only school they have partnership with acknowledged the positive effects of the programme on students' motivation towards English learning. The school has agreed to have some teachers helping during the camp and many teachers are encouraged to observe classes to learn from the foreign teachers.

5.3 Scaffolding from TAs

Although teaching by native speakers is quite responsive to an English communication environment, there are still challenges faced by those native-speaking teachers. Most of all, the language barrier and cultural differences are obstructions for native-speaking teachers. The founder informed in the interview that: "One of the biggest challenges I noticed… even though the teachers may be very, very, very good teachers, they are still struggling with students' real understanding, at a deep level, what the teacher is talking about. Teachers do not know how to communicate in the best way or challenge students the best way." Hence, TAs play a key scaffolding role in English Camp. Migrant students are impressed that TAs speak such good English. According to Vygotsky (1978, 1986), learning happens in the interaction with more competent peers or teachers. As more competent and slightly senior contemporaries, TAs provides migrant children opportunities to learn as well. Moreover, the founder mentioned that one TA (his student) was a bit shy in his class. However, he passionately offered migrant children support. The interactions between these two groups from very different social classes spark a special effect, actually helping one another.

6 Conclusion

The research data indicates that even though the English programme is rather short, the encouraging and warm environment not only purely motivates students' oral practice but also affects their social meanings. The project results demonstrate that English Camp does open doors for migrant children to a wider world, where they are academically successful and users of English.

The strengths found in English Camp identify successful factors: dynamic relations, CLT-oriented curriculum and scaffolding from TAs. I hope that these can give some insights for educators of this programme and organizers who want to replicate programmes to help migrant children. By knowing students' ideas, teachers and instructors are informed of students' interests and factors that contribute to

(un)successful learning. Moreover, it is encouraging that English Camp enables students to imagine a different future and students feel respected about their dreams or imagined communities as well. A small programme cannot end unequal education opportunity but it helps disadvantaged children visulise a more promising future that may change their learning trajectories.

This work makes several noteworthy contributions to second/ foreign language education. First, it has advanced the importance of a learner identity research lens. The theoretical approaches framing this research highlight the social dynamics inherent to language learning. Therefore, it is suggested that social theoretical frameworks can be utilised for future empirical research.

Additionally, the new identities found from these migrant children are different from previous studies. Taking marginalised identity for example, it has been shown that students have challenges becoming part of the city discourse because they attend a suburban migrant-only school. However, they are more comfortable with the migrant-only school due to the fact that they share more similar backgrounds with classmates and teachers. It demonstrates that identity can have contrary influence. It raises an urgent question of knowing how to adapt migrant students in the host cities in the era of modernization of China. It puts forward a need to conduct studies in migrant children who are able to study in host city local public schools to identify the key features to promote migrant students' learning.

However, the small scale and short-term nature of this study warrants further longitudinal research in migrant children's identity and communities (including the communities where they live and imagine), as these pertain to English language acquisition in a variety of contexts. The dynamic nature and complexity of identity requires a continuous approach. Hence, it is responsive to explore students' identity over a longer period. Additionally, examining students' learning outcomes in migrant-only schools is also a good way to investigate the connection between learning motivation, investment, and learning outcomes.

Acknowledgements

References

Adler, P. A., & Adler, P. (1994). Observational techniques. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 377–392). Sage.

Atkinson, M. (2014). Reframing literacy in adult ESL programmes: Making the case for the inclusion of identity. *Literacy & Numeracy Studies,* 22(1), 3–20.

Bartlett, L., & Garcia, O. (2011). *Additive schooling in subtractive times: Bilingual education and Dominican immigrant youth in the heights.* Vancouver University Press.

Bruner, J.S. (1990). *Acts of meaning.* Harvard University Press.

Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 35–56

Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2021). Investment and motivation in language learning: What's the difference? *Language Teaching, 1–12.* https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444821000057

Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (Eds.). (2009). The L2 motivational self-system. In Z. Dornyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self.* (pp. 9–42). Multilingual Matters.

Firth, A. & Wagner, J. (1997). On discourse, communication, and (some) fundamental concepts in SLA research. *The Modern Language Journal,* 81, 285–300.

Finocchario & Brumfit (1983). *The Functional-Notional approach: From theory to practice.* Oxford University Press.

Gardner, R. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation.* Edward Arnold.

Gao, F (2014). Social-class identity and English learning: Studies of Chinese learners, *Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 13*(2), 92–98, https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2014.901820

Gao, F., & Wright, W. E. (2020). A systematic analysis of five years of research articles published in the Journal of Language, Identity, and Education (2015–2019), *Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 19*(1), 3–8, https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2020.1715760

Gao, X., Cheng, H., & Kelly, P. (2008). Supplementing an uncertain investment? Mainland Chinese students practicing English together in Hong Kong. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication, 18*(1), 9–29.

Gao, Y., Cheng Y., Zhao Y., & Zhou, Y. (2005). Self-identity changes and English learning among Chinese undergraduates. *World Englishes*, 24, 39–51.

Gao, Y., Li, Y., & Li, W. (2002). EFL learning and self-identity construction: Three cases of Chinese college English majors. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching,* 12, 95–119.

Gao, Y., Zhao, Y., Cheng, Y., & Zhou, Y. (2004). Motivation types of Chinese university undergraduates. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 14, 45–64.

Gu, M. M. (2010). Identities constructed in difference: English language learners in China. *Journal of Pragmatics, 42*(1), 1–152.

Guo, X. G., & Gu, M. M. (2016). Identity construction through English language learning in intra-national migration: A study on Uyghur students in China. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 42*(14), 1–18.

Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222–237). Lawrence & Wishart.

Hawkins, M.R. (2005). Becoming a student: Identity work and academic literacies in early school. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39, 59–82.

Holland, D., Lachicotte, W., Skinner, D., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Harvard University Press.

Howell, E. (2008). *Struggling to write: Identity and agency in a pre-university English for academic purposes programme*. University of Exeter.

Kanno, Y (2003). Imagined communities, school visions, and the education of bilingual students in Japan, *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education, 2*(4), 285–300, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327701JLIE0204_4

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching.* Oxford Applied Linguistics.

Lantolf, J. P. (2000). Introducing sociocultural theory. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 1–26). Oxford University Press.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning. Legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge University Press.

Li, Z., & Hao, H. (2009). *English teaching in Chinese context: Theory and practice*. Hebei Education Press.

Li, Z., & Ren, H.(2015). 农民工子女英语学习动机减退影响因素研究 [A study of factors that demotivate migrant children's English learning]. 英语与学习 [English and Learning]*, 8X,3.

Lu, Y., & Zhou, H. (2013). Academic achievement and loneliness of migrant children in China: School segregation and segmented assimilation. *Comparative Education Review*, *57*(1), 85–116.

Macintyre, P., Mackinnon, S. & Clément, R. (2009). 3. The baby, the bathwater, and the future of language learning motivation research. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self* (pp. 43–65). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691293-004

McGroarty, M. (1998). Constructive and constructivist challenges for applied linguistics. *Language Learning*, 48, 591–622.

McKay, S. L., & Wong, C. S. (1996). Multiple discourses, multiple identities: Investment and agency in second-language learning among Chinese adolescent immigrant students. *Harvard Educational Review*, *66*(3), 577–609.

Mcmahon, M. (1997). Social constructivism and the world wide web-a paradigm for learning. *Australian Society for Computers in Tertiary Education.*

Morita, N. (2004). Negotiating participation and identity in second language academic communities. *TESOL Quarterly*, *38*(4), 573–603.

Norton Peirce, B. (1993). *Language learning, social identity, and immigrant women.* Doctoral thesis, University of Toronto.

Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning Social processes and educational practice*. Pearson Education.

Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation*. Multilingual Matters.

Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2001). Changing perspectives on good language learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35, 307–321.

Norton, B. (Ed.). (1997). Language, identity and ownership of English. *[Special issue].TESOL Quarterly, 31*(3). 409–429.

Norton, B. (2015). Identity, investment, and faces of English internationally. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 38, 4, 375–391.

Olsen, L. (2001). Public education, immigrants, and racialization. In G. Gerstle & J. Mollenkopf (Eds.) *Contemporary and historical perspectives on immigrant political incorporation* (pp. 371–411). Russell Sage Foundation.

Oxford, RL. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know.* Heinle & Heinle.

Pavlenko, A. (2000). Access to linguistic resources: Key variable in second language learning. *Estudios de Sociolingüística* 1, 85–105.

Peirce, B. N. (1995). Social identity, investment, and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, *29*(1), 9–31.

Portes, A., & Hao, L. (2004). The schooling of children of immigrants: Contextual effects on the educational attainment of the second generation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *101*(33), 11920–11927.

Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers (2nd ed.)*. Sage.

Shao, X. (2019). 浅谈农民工子女英语学习的问题及解决策略 [Notes on how to solve migrant children's English learning problems]. *新东方英语：中学版 [New Oriental English: Senior School Version]*, (8), 1.

Tang, Q. (2019). 浅谈民工子女英语学习的问题及对策 [Discuss problems and strategies for migrant children's English learning]. *中外交流 [Chinese and Foreign Communication]*, 000(006), 274.

Vasquez, C. (2011). TESOL, teacher identity, and the need for 'small story' research, *TESOL Quarterly, 45*(3), 535–545.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1986). *Thought and language* (A. Kozulin, Trans.). MIT Press.

Wang, W., & Yang, D. (2009). 北京市农名工子女初中后教育研究 [A study of migrant children's education after junior high school in Beijing]. *北京社会科学 [Beijing Social Science]*, 1, 49–54.

Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructural theory*. Blackwell.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity.* Cambridge University Press.

Xiong, C. (2021). 两极化：流动儿童群体文化背后的教育制度结构 [Polarizing: The education system structure behind floating children group culture]. *探索与争鸣 [Exploration and Free Views],* 5, 31–34.

Yuan, X., Fang, X., Liu, Y., Hou, S., & Lin, X. (2013). Development of urban adaptation and social identity of migrant children in China: A longitudinal study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 37*(3), 354–365.

Hong Zhang is currently working in Dulwich College Suzhou, China. She is an experienced teacher in the field of foundational education and interesed in researching the enhancement of young Chinese students' English learning.