

Original Paper

Perceptions of Chinese Students Regarding the Role of Anglophone Cultures in Study Motivation and the Learning of English

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Abstract

Language and culture are intricately linked, and it is believed that the success of learning a language is affected by the culture of the language being learned. This study assesses the perceptions of Chinese students studying at an Anglo-Chinese joint college with regards to whether prior or existing knowledge and/or exposure to Anglophone culture(s) had or would improve their learning and if this also had motivated them to study in this joint college. The findings indicate students perceived a direct correlation between understanding Anglophone culture and the learning of English, and that gaining more knowledge about Anglophone cultures would positively affect their learning of English. However, this was not a significant motivation factor to pursue their higher education studies in the college. Most students stated that learning more about Anglophone cultural social interactions and popular culture would improve their English. Our results suggest the formation of a higher education community of practice among more senior students. As students progress through their course, they refer to their experience at university as their main exposure to Anglophone culture. Therefore, further developing students' exposure to, and knowledge of, Anglophone culture might have a beneficial impact on their English language skills, student experience and prospects.

Keywords

anglophone culture, trans-national education, internationalization, socio-cultural, China, international branch campuses

1. Introduction

In the past decade, China has incorporated English as the medium of instruction (EMI) in tertiary level Chinese-English bilingual teaching institutions (Macaro & Han, 2020). In addition, a growing formal recognition has been accorded to English for academic purposes (EAP) and English for specific purposes (ESP) as important approaches to improving students' academic and professional English in different areas (Carkin, 2005). Moreover, the underpinnings for the promotion of English have been pragmatic, and job orientated (Yang & Ren, 2019).

However, most English language initiatives in China have underachieved so far with respect to teaching quality and students' academic performance (Lozano, 2015). Some scholars suggest that this is mainly because the radical reforms in the Chinese educational context conflict with traditional Chinese attitudes regarding teaching and learning. It is suggested that the Chinese culture of learning and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) are in conflict in several important aspects and English language teaching (ELT) has drawn strong support from the Chinese culture of learning in such a way that English pedagogy has involved what Hu terms "a curious combination of the grammar translation method and audiolingualism" (Hu, 2002). Many Chinese educators have demonstrated resistance and reluctance to adapting their English teaching theories and pedagogies, and grammar translation remains the major teaching strategy, which despite its cultural congruity, "has failed to develop an adequate level of communicative competence, i.e., the ability to use the target language for authentic communication" (Hu, 2002). It is reported that Chinese students seem to find it challenging to suspend their beliefs to engage in learning activities and feel uneasy in a more democratic communicative learning environment (Hu, 2002; Jackson & Chen, 2018).

Liu (2016) argues that in order to achieve sustained English learning, not only students need to be convinced that ESP (English with reference to specific terminology and skills) is important for them, but also educators require to develop courses that are interesting and enjoyable (Liu, 2016). In addition, researchers have suggested that cultural content should be integrated in the ESP syllabus because it includes what the learners need as current or future professionals to play the role of cultural intermediaries (Aguilar Pérez, 2018; Kavalir, 2013).

Although the number of EMI university courses is growing globally (Dearden, 2014; Simbolon, 2021), the views of Chinese students in EMI institutions with regard to the effect of culture in learning English via ESP courses have been under-researched. In this study, Chinese undergraduate (UG) STEM students studying at an EMI Anglo-Chinese joint college in northern China were asked whether they believed that prior or existing knowledge and/or exposure to Anglophone culture(s) had or would improve their learning outcomes. The research seeks to know whether these students regard exposure to

these cultures as an overly light-hearted distraction, or if they are more positive in their assessments. Moreover, while English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and EMI have been represented extensively in the literature (Alhassan, Ali, & Ali, 2021; Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2012), this article provides a distinctive alternative perspective on EMI in the context of an international collaboration.

It is a truism that English language has become an international means to exchange technological, political, cultural, and economic knowledge, with the result that it has become the dominant foreign language in the curricula of many educational institutions. In 2013 the British Council estimated that English was spoken ‘at a useful level’ by around 1.75 billion people worldwide, i.e., one in every four people (Council, 2013, p. 2). As a result, ELT in non-target language countries (TLCs) has received a great deal of attention (O’Dwyer & Atli, 2018) as has the dominance of English in the context of cultural globalization (Scollon, 1999).

1.1 Culture, Science, and English Language Learning

In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams (1976) identifies “three broad active categories of usage” for the word ‘culture’. In the Cambridge Dictionary, culture is defined as “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time” (Cambridge international dictionary of English, 1995). It can refer to “a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development”, and as an abstract noun, it describes “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (Williams, 1976). For Williams, the latter sense of the word is in most widespread use; “culture is music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film”. In this study no prescriptive definition of ‘culture’ has been applied, although the two senses of culture as a way of life, and as music, literature, etc. underscore the questions asked in the research instrument.

This study mainly refers on Anglophone cultures, which consist of, or belong to the cultures of English-speaking nations that share common ancestral, historical, or cultural ties to England or the United Kingdom broadly and maintain close political, diplomatic, legal, and business co-operations such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States (Vucetic, 2020).

Science as practiced in higher education, and as taught to the student cohort in this study, is conventionally viewed as culturally neutral. According to Stevenson (1989), a conventional view of scientific research, or at least of the pure kind traditionally applied in universities, is that it is a completely value-free activity. However, following Williams, scientific practice may be seen as, “a particular way of life” (Williams, 1976) involving codes and practices into which the student is enculturated. Writing from an anthropological perspective, Maddock (1981) argues that learning science forms a part of the wider cultural matrix of society and that educational considerations regarding science must take this wider perspective into account as both pure science and technology have formed highly formal aspects which have become rooted in education and professional societies.

At face value, the link between culture and language is perhaps more obvious than that between science and culture, although the idea of bringing culture into language learning is not without its critics. For most researchers, however, the links between language learning and culture are beneficial and even

inevitable. Kramsch (1995), for example, states that there is an integral link between language teaching and culture in that, material culture is constantly mediated, interpreted, and recorded through language, and as a result, culture becomes the concern of the language teachers. Similarly, Sharpe (1992) argues that teaching a foreign language necessarily implies teaching the culture in which it is embedded. The author claims that the language makes no sense and has no meaning outside the cultural setting in which it is spoken.

However, although this is the mainstream view among applied linguists who have looked at these matters, some scholars question the efficacy of situating culture in ELT classes. For example, Widdowson (1990) states that, while discussing culture is important in other contexts, it is not the business of language teaching to bridge the cultural gap. The author emphasizes that a concern for culture can indeed be a distraction from more pressing pedagogic matters, and the acquiring of cultural knowledge is a corollary and not a condition of the language learning process. In addition to the 'more pressing pedagogic needs' argument, others question whether English in its current globalized iterations belongs to any one culture, and as such they question the need to tie English to any set of cultures, Anglophone or otherwise. For example, Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2011) raises the possibility that it may be debatable whether culture should be taught at all, considering the current uses of English as an international language and as a lingua franca.

Even if it is accepted that culture has a part to play in language teaching, cultural transmission in its broad sense, has traditionally been seen to have little or no part to play in ESP. Indeed, the self-limiting character of teaching English for specific purposes is seen to be one of its main advantages, in that, in theory at least, language teaching is designed based on the learner's particular needs and purposes. This removes limits and restrictions from the learning design and makes all the learning relevant and therefore secures good motivation (Stevens, 1997; Yu, 2020). However, needs analysis may not always identify cultural knowledge as essential as learners may not always be fully aware of what they need to know (Stevens, 1997).

As with the traditional view of science outlined above, ESP has been seen to be relatively free of culture. For example, Bowers (1992) argues that in its international context the English language is used in functional transactions which cut across national boundaries and is as such essentially acultural. Bowers uses the role of English in computer programming as an example and argues that the intention of using English in such is not because of beliefs or political tendencies, but rather because English is the default mean of the information technology (IT) world. The author also refers to scientific publications in English and highlights that this is mainly due to the fact that English language is within the subculture of scientific communication in order to reach the widest possible readership.

Although it is evident that the introduction of English as the most common first foreign language in primary education in the world is mostly based on its universal functional value rather than on any intention to expose learners to the culture of Anglophone societies (Hopkins, 2014), several criticisms can be made of Bowers' aculturalism with respect to ESP. The first is that in an obvious sense, STEM

UGs are apprentices to a set of practices (lab-work, report writing, conferences, working with particular technologies, etc.), which might reasonably be termed cultural. Secondly, language learning is not the same as language usage in real-world situations, no matter how much the teacher and course materials may strive for authenticity. Even if the student wishes to learn English with strictly functional outcomes in mind, the ways to reach those outcomes may be various and may beneficially include broader cultural inputs.

1.2 Traditional Approaches to Language Learning

The traditional approach to language education in China which persists despite ongoing reforms (Rashid, Abdul Rahman, & Yunus, 2017) has been extensively criticized due to its poor outcomes despite high investments (Hu, 2005). For example, Nunan and Choi (2010) refer to this perspective as a product-oriented view, in which language is simply another subject on the curriculum consisting of a body of content that the learner must internalize. The grammar translation approach to language learning is characterized by the systematic study of grammar and vocabulary, and involves memorization of grammatical patterns, and translation with an emphasis on accurate written output. In practical terms, this approach leads to a teacher-centered learning (TCL) experience and students with limited second language communicative competence (Salaberry, 1997). While this approach may allow for limited communication and comprehension, it does not necessarily lead to a deeper understanding and a more flexible application of the language (Demetriadis et al., 2003). This is particularly true for non-native adult learners, for whom the product-oriented learning process is at best an intellectual endeavor rather than an experiential one (Chen, 1997).

In relation to EMI courses in Chinese universities, Zhao and Dixon (2017) note that while learners on these courses study in English, they do not use English to socialize and are not exposed to the culture(s) related to the English language. Therefore, learners perceive English as a code rather than a fully-fledged language. As a result, traditional ELT has been unsuccessful in improving the level of communicative competence in Chinese learners that would enable students to apply the English language in authentic contexts (McKay, 2003). This failure resulted in the implementation of new communication-focused English teaching initiatives into the Chinese context and curricula at different levels of education. For example, Li and Li (2004) propose that ELT should be shifted to the development of learners' intercultural communicative competence and learners should work towards intercultural speakership. They argue that although this approach represents great challenges to ELT learners to adopt the new implementation, the prospect and rewards it brings will be invaluable.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is the Sociocultural Theory (SCT) of learning and teaching, popularized by the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978). This framework proposes that knowledge is a social construction and learners should be actively involved in meaning-making processes. It has been shown that culture can affect the way a language is spoken, and it is therefore suggested that the culture of a target language be taught to aid students in becoming more successful in

that language. For Vygotsky, “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological)” (Daniels, 2016). This transition, from socially mediated cultural development to development inside the child, is not a matter of the transmission and replication of knowledge but involves its appropriation and transformation. For Vygotsky’s followers these claims about child development can also be applied to what happens in schools as learners do not merely replicate constructors’ capabilities but transform the knowledge provided to them during the processes of appropriation (Turuk, 2008).

Followers of Vygotsky, who argue for the notion of authentic activity, believe that learners require much more than self-contained examples and abstract concepts, and that students “need to be exposed to the use of a domain’s conceptual tools in authentic activity” (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Kramsch (1995) also notes that researchers in the Vygotskian and SCT traditions have developed dynamic ways to understand language competences based on the difference between what learners can do alone and what they can do with the assistance of others. Based on this conception of the social basis of individual learning, a task-based pedagogy has been developed in which learners cooperate on solving problems that mirror those encountered in real-world cross-cultural exchanges (Kramsch, 1995). In this sense, exposure to and interaction with aspects of Anglophone cultures might constitute a set of authentic activities for the learners in the context described in this study.

1.4 Research Questions

China Medical University-The Queen’s University of Belfast Joint College (CQC) is a transnational education (TNE) initiative in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, People’s Republic of China (PRC). In partnership with the Queen’s University Belfast (QUB), School of Pharmacy, CQC offers UG dual-degree programs in pharmaceutical sciences and pharmaceutical biotechnology on the campus of the China Medical University (CMU) in China.

Because ESP focuses on teaching language in particular contexts, needs analysis is central to course design (Basturkmen, 2018). A comprehensive analysis must routinely and iteratively determine the needs of relevant stakeholders in the educational context, including senior management, teachers, and institution administrators at various levels, but as Anthony (2018) notes, the most vital contributors in a learning context are the students themselves, who demand enjoyable, interesting and manageable courses that are relevant to their future goals with the proviso that students often lack the experience and/or knowledge required to accurately decide what, how, when, and where they will use English in the target academic or occupational setting. Needs analysis aims at revealing learners self-reported needs, seeks in part to know what they find interesting, enjoyable, and relevant, with the aim of meeting their needs to the extent that this is feasible and consonant with the language knowledge and skills required in the target context.

The main teaching and learning challenges that CQC students may face include understanding and using technical English language, lack of familiarity with the UK universities’ teaching approaches and

assessment techniques. Therefore, in order to gain an understanding of how best to improve student engagement, performance, and academic experience, this research intends to:

- (i) understand student English language proficiency,
- (ii) explore the general motivational factors encouraging students to learn science in an EMI UG STEM course in China,
- (iii) investigate if learning about Anglophone culture(s) had been persuasive in students' decisions to study at CQC, and
- (iv) evaluate the extent to which these students think that knowledge of, and exposure to, Anglophone cultures could play a role in learning English and improve their learning outcomes.

It is hoped that the results of the study could serve as a baseline for understanding the level of knowledge these Chinese students have of Anglophone cultures and whether they believe that exposure to these cultures does assist, can assist, or hinders their learning. Furthermore, by assessing student's perceptions, it might be possible to develop learning methodologies that are student guided and focused. Having this knowledge will allow educators to plan their curricula in a way that might encourage, for example, integration of cultural references into the scientific subject matter, and to develop materials, courses, and curricula that assist or enable non-native speakers to better grasp and understand both the language and subject being taught. Overall, these changes could positively impact both the learning and teaching environment in transnational educational institutions.

2. Method

2.1 Background Context

English is the medium of instruction in all aspects of the CQC programs. Although these programs are open to students from outside of China, all students who took part in this research were from China. The participants in this study comprised 148 students engaged in the courses at three levels (years 1-3) in the 2019-2020 Academic Year. As the college was still a rather new establishment, it was not possible to recruit a larger number of students in that academic year.

In order to proceed to the second level (year 2, L2) of the UG course at CQC, level 1 (first year, L1) students must achieve an overall grade of 6 in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test or successfully complete an EAP course which aims to develop the students' academic literacies in the four skills through their engagement with authentic texts in areas relating to pharmaceutical sciences/biotechnology. Although the EAP course does not directly reflect the content of the EMI UG course, students are introduced to some aspects of pharmacological practice and subject matter using videos and written texts within the course units with scientific content, such as clinical research process, antibiotic resistance, and drug delivery methods. While some of this material is focused on China, the majority of the learning resources relate to Anglophone contexts. Students studying at levels 2 and 3 currently receive no formal language instruction.

2.2 Research Instrument

To understand the extent to which these students believe that knowledge of, and exposure to, Anglophone (English speaking) cultures might play a role in selecting CQC to study, learning English, and improving learning outcomes, a quantitative questionnaire was developed aimed at collecting self-reported data from CQC students at all levels. Each level cohort was invited to take part in the survey anonymously via the TurningPoint Personal Response System (PRS) (Turning Technologies LLC, UK). This technology enables interaction between the instructor and students via multiple-choice questions (MCQs) which can be embedded within PowerPoint presentations and answered instantly by students using a web browser or their mobile devices that send results instantly to the instructor. TurningPoint was used because it is a timely and cost-effective survey construction system, which removes factors that may limit response rates, such as the use of paper-based questionnaires, thus increasing convenience.

The questionnaires were written in both English and Chinese language (professionally translated by a Mandarin interpreter) and were piloted with Chinese postgraduate (PG) students (n=10) who were registered on PG programs in the UK and were modified based on the feedback these students provided including rewording/rephrasing questions to be clearer and understandable by students. Some of the questions had previously been piloted with the help of international UG STEM students enrolled on various courses at QUB. Although the feedback from the piloting process was considered, the authors also appreciate that students immersed in Anglophone culture in the UK may have different perceptions from those studying in China. Therefore, the authors also considered the existing literature (Liu & Fang, 2017), previous CQC pedagogical questionnaires (Malekigorji et al., 2018), and feedback derived from discussions with other QUB researchers with expertise in educational research to create the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was first presented in its entirety in English during one classroom session and then in the Chinese language at a subsequent session, which enabled the researchers to assess the students understanding of the English worded questions in comparison with the same questionnaire in their native tongue. This was undertaken in the belief that the quality of the obtained data improves if the questionnaire is presented in the respondents' first language (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2012). Questionnaire distribution took place after ethical approval had been granted by the School of Pharmacy Ethics Committee at QUB (Ref: 006PMY2019).

The questionnaire, which contained twelve questions, includes a combination of multiple choice and rating questions, allowing for categorical data to be captured, all answered anonymously. To maximize the response rates, the questionnaire was relatively short, and the questions were in a closed-question format (Edwards et al., 2009). The first eleven questions were single best answer (SBA) multiple choice questions followed by a checkbox rating question (multiple selections).

2.3 Data Analysis

Responses collected from completed live TurningPoint surveys were coded and recorded using SPSS 22, with the same program being utilized for subsequent statistical analysis. The analysis of the data largely takes the form of descriptive statistics i.e., number, frequency, or percentage as appropriate. Appropriate statistical tests were conducted with significance set a priori at $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

With regards to the response rate across the two sets of questionnaires answered by students in different study years, Table 1 shows that more students attempted the Chinese version of the questionnaire compared to the English survey in L1. However, similar numbers of students participated in the English and Mandarin surveys in L2 and L3 (level 3). This suggests that L1 students, who have less experience studying in English language, found the translated questionnaire (Chinese version) easier to answer than senior students.

Although the results of the two questionnaires are correlated (correlation > 0.9), statistical analysis indicates significant difference in student responses ($p < 0.05$) between questionnaires in different languages, which again highlights the effect of translating questionnaires.

Table 1. Number of Participants in English and Mandarin Surveys across the Three Levels of Study

Level of BSc study	1	2	3
Number of participants in English survey	34 (Rr [*] =32%)	50 (Rr=67%)	24 (Rr=38%)
Number of participants in Mandarin survey	70 (Rr=76%)	50 (Rr=67%)	28 (Rr=44%)

*Rr=response rate

Anecdotal evidence also proves that although CQC students are studying in English language, they would prefer to receive important educational announcements and communications in Chinese language as well to make sure that they fully understood the context and information with regards to their study.

The authors believe that the results obtained from the Chinese survey are more reliable and accurate, firstly because more students took part in Mandarin survey. Secondly, students may have understood the content and the questions of the survey in their mother tongue language better. Thirdly, participants took the English survey first, thus they were to some extent familiar with the survey content and had more time to reflect upon it prior to taking the second survey in Mandarin. Therefore, further data analysis was performed only on the Mandarin survey results.

In relation to the knowledge of English culture, British culture was selected by students as the most familiar Anglophone culture across all three levels in comparison to American, Australian and/or New Zealand cultures in general. This is different from what the Chinese public perceive as the main exposed Anglophone culture in general, as China uses American English teaching in its primary and secondary education (Liu, 2021) and is more influenced to American culture through media (Flew, 2016). As a result, it is strongly believed that the student familiarity with the British culture in this study is to be correlated to their exposure of British higher education at CQC as a UK-China joint college.

With respect to English language proficiency, demographic data shows that 63% of the first- and second-level students have overall IELTS test 1 scores of 5-6, while in L3, the majority of students (62%) hold an overall score of 6-7. This is related to the English language requirement discussed earlier as CQC students must either achieve 6 overall in IELTS or pass an EAP course to progress to L2. Around half of the learners across three levels indicated that they have ‘good’ (average indicator; from excellent to beginner) knowledge of the English language. 22% and 26% of L2 and L3 students reflected a ‘very good’ English knowledge, respectively, that was significantly higher than L1 responses (7%) ($p < 0.05$), which confirms student progression in English language skills as they progress through their studies. All students across the three levels perceived speaking as the most challenging skill in English language which is in line with the literature (Rao, 2019), where the L3 students showed the highest level of confidence in speaking, reading, and writing skills in English.

In light of student motivational factors to study a science degree taught in English, Figure 1 shows that the three levels reflected a similar perception.

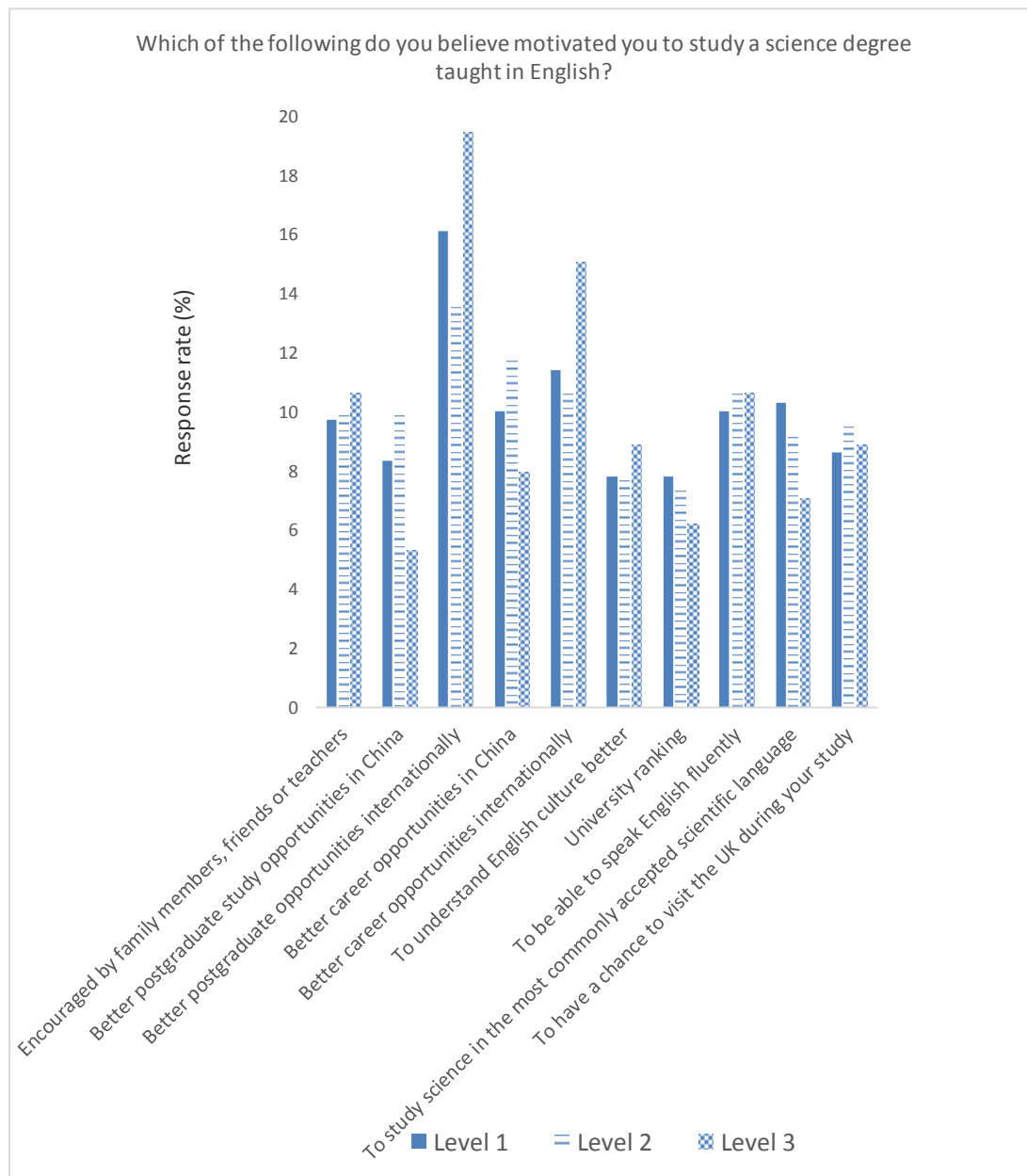


Figure 1. Participants' Motivational Factors to Study a Science Degree Taught in English across the Three Levels

Having better PG study and career opportunities internationally were selected the most by both L1 and L3 students with the highest ranking in L3, which is presumed to be affected by the year they are studying in, as L3 students were more likely than others to have started planning for their future with regards to PG studies and job applications. All levels also indicated university ranking as the least motivating factor. In L2, better PG study opportunities internationally and work opportunities in China were ranked as the highest and understanding the Anglophone culture as the second lowest motivating factors. With respect to student knowledge and understanding of English-speaking cultures, while 42%

of the first-level students reflected that they have ‘some understanding’, most students in L2 and L3 (47% and 60%, respectively) believed that they have ‘general insight’ into English-speaking cultures (ESC). This was to be expected as L1 students do not have the same level of experience of studying and communicating with peers and educators in English and/or taking part in extracurricular activities in an English-speaking environment in comparison with senior students as previously discussed. Figure 2 reflects student responses regarding four survey questions in relation to ESC and the main mean(s) of exposure to ESC.

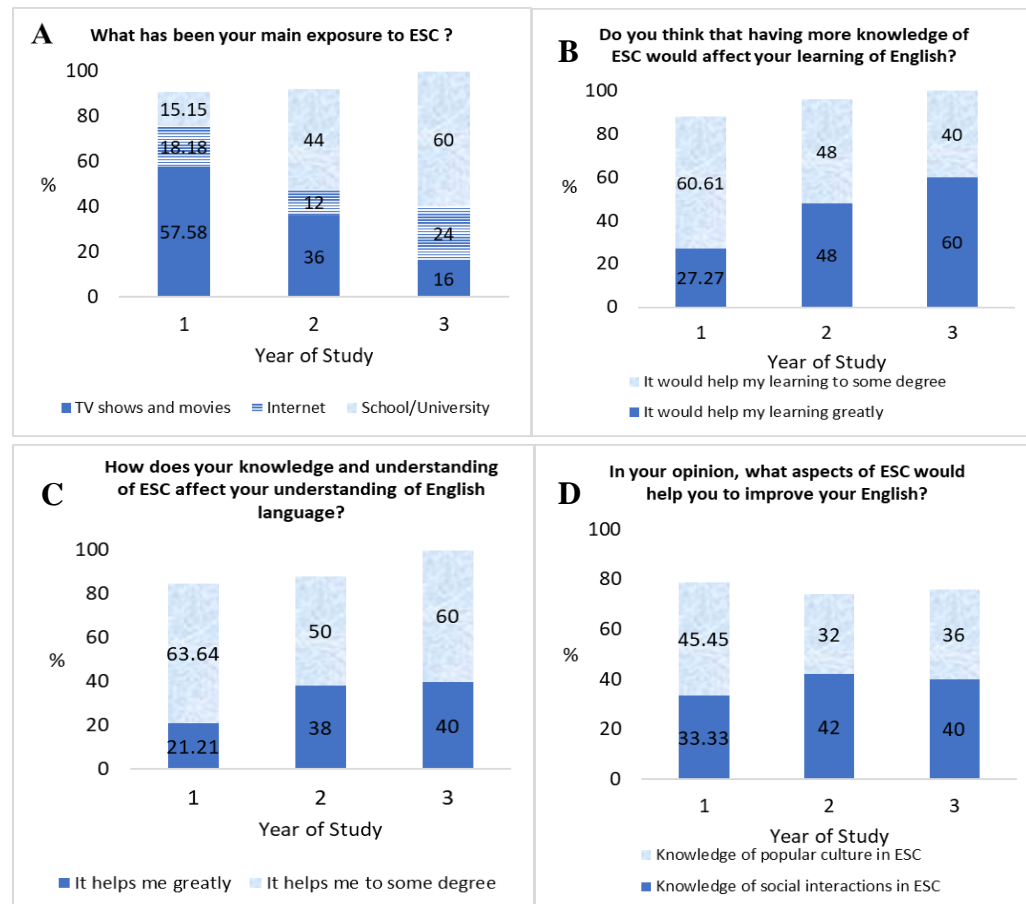


Figure 2. Student Perception in Relation to (A) the Main Exposure Tool to ESC, (B) the Effect of ESC on Learning in English, (C) the Effect of Understanding ESC on Understanding English Language, and (D) the Important Aspects of ESC that Improve Learners' English

L1 students, who have less experience in studying in EMI, perceived ‘English TV shows’ and ‘movies’ as the main means of exposure to ESC (Figure 2A). The ‘Internet’ was the second most popular medium of exposure, and ‘school/university’ was the least popular medium of exposure to ESC amongst this group. In terms of the main contexts through which these students were exposed to ESCs, there is a marked transition between L1 and L2 and L3; for L1 they were mostly exposed to ESCs via

the internet, television, and movies, while 60% of L3 students stating that the main exposure to ESCs is through ‘school/university’ (Figure 2A).

According to the effect of English culture in learning of English, the majority of L3 students believe that the knowledge of ESC significantly affects their learning in English, but half of the L2 and less than a third of L1 cohort shared this viewpoint (Figure 2B). This result was in line with the responses received for a similar question, which shows that while only around 20% of the L1 students believe that their knowledge and understanding of ESC helps them to understand English language greatly, 38% and 40% of L2 and L3 students, respectively, agree that knowing about ESC influences their understanding in English significantly (Figure 2C). In addition, most of the L2 and L3 students indicated that the knowledge of social interactions in ESC would mostly help them to improve their English. In contrast, most L1 students reflected that the knowledge of popular culture in ESC is more important in learning of English (Figure 2D).

4. Discussion

As anticipated, more students took the Mandarin version of the study survey. Translating questionnaires is a complex process for non-native students, which is commonly underestimated. This is mainly due to the fact that non-native English-speaking students often understand and speak scientific English very well and therefore it is mistakenly assumed that they are fully capable of translating an English questionnaire into their native language (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). Moreover, poor participation of L3 students is believed to be related to their significantly higher study commitment in comparison with L1 and L2 students, and it is hoped the inclusion of incentives, i.e., rewards might be supportive in enhancing participation in future studies.

Only less than 10% of students referred to understanding English culture as a motivation factor to study at CQC across all three levels, with the highest ranking occurred in L1. Securing good motivation among students is almost certainly a more complex proposition than that described by Strevens (1997), in which students are motivated because the language input reflects their specific needs. It is expected that learners would find highly specific courses very motivating because they are designed to be clearly relevant to the learners’ needs. However, this may not always be the case and students are not always as focused on the target situation as it may seem at first. Students change courses and workers change jobs and roles, and few of the members of our narrow-angled ESP course may in fact end up studying or working in the situations for which the course was designed. As Dörnyei (2008) claims, if learners were given to decide what to do, academic learning for many students would be probably feature low on their agenda. In the Chinese university context, student choices may be variously affected by factors such as gender, class background, high school exam results, geographical region, and parental influence. For example, with regard to the latter, Lee and Morrish (2012) note that in China, parents significantly control their children’s decision regarding which university to apply and major to take. This is evidenced by the collective pronoun ‘we’ is used by the parents when discussing how the decision was

made rather than 'he' or 'she' as the student. Given these possible external influences on student decisions, we cannot assume that they are intrinsically motivated to learn what they have 'chosen' to study, and so we cannot assume that English for the specific purpose related to their course will be more motivating than English delivered in other contexts. Indeed, other contexts may allow for pleasurable and less stressful learning opportunities.

In addition, while results of this study indicate a difference in self-reported knowledge and attitudes between the L1 cohort and L2 and L3 students, a belief that exposure to and knowledge of ESCs would benefit language acquisition was widespread throughout all levels. This suggests that these students might be positively influenced by the inclusion of cultural material in their UG courses. Although, as expected, most students were motivated to join this EMI course due to family influence and career concerns rather than an interest in cultures, the majority of students felt that exposure to culture could help them improve their English skills and knowledge. However, as noted, while most L1 students claimed that they derived their exposure to ESC from television, the cinema, and the internet (76%), for both L2 and L3 students, the major locus of exposure to ESC shifted from the media to school/university. This might be due to these students having spent more time studying and communicating in English language in the later stages of their academic life (Figure 2A). But it may also indicate a shift in what these students understand by ESC.

As learners proceed through the course, meet lecturers on a daily basis, undertake lab works, write reports, and possibly deal with a culturally different approach to knowledge transmission from that which they have received heretofore, they may achieve a deeper awareness of the cultures of practice and performance incorporated in the UG course. If this is the case, cultural material devised for students at different levels should take this shift into account. Nowadays, there is a greater emphasis on cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) to become an integral part of English classrooms. For example, Berrell, Teal and Gloet (2005) state that ICC is a complex of abilities (including host language proficiency) that are needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself. The importance of exposing students to behavior culture is most widely recognized in the field of ESP for business studies, where the possibility of miscommunication suggests that lack of shared schemas between people from different backgrounds is more likely to lead to communication breakdown than differences at the level of linguistic code (Klitmøller & Jakob, 2013).

Although the students indicate that the knowledge of ESC positively affects their acquisition of English, Chinese students can learn a lot about ESC without the English language. Weber and Jia note that in the global economy, subsidiaries of global firms efficiently supply global media in localized forms as the government aim to prepare children for their future roles in the global economy but supplies global culture and media in localized forms (Weber & Jia, 2007). This means that people can read blockbuster English books and watch English programs and movies all in Chinese language for example and 'participate' in global culture without knowing English (Yang, 2016).

The easy access to popular ESC in Chinese has implications for using pop culture in the ESP classroom. In some ways, this means that using materials from popular ESC may not be as motivating as it might have been before the globalization of popular culture. However, this prior exposure to ESC in Chinese could be the starting point for fruitful intercultural comparisons. Hu (2008) argues that government policy in China is to move the majority language students (i.e., Mandarin speakers) away from mainstream education in Chinese to a greater use of English as a medium of instruction in an exclusive education system and discusses further that this emphasis has come at the expense of bilingual programs which could promote some of the more than 100 minority languages spoken by 106 million people in China (8.4 percent of the population). At the very least, this should lead practitioners in EMI colleges to carefully introduce culture into the classroom as part of an intercultural dialogue that is based on an enquiry into cultures rather than the promotion of one culture at the expense of others (Tsung, 2009). In addition, specific socio-cultural courses for Chinese students at higher levels have proven to be greatly in demand (Belcher, 2009). These courses aim to enable students to understand the society, history, geography, politics, education, economy, etc. of English-speaking countries, along with their cultural traditions with the goal of enhancing their tolerance, sensitivity and flexibility towards cultural difference, and developing their intercultural communicative competence (Belcher, 2009), which is defined as a complex of abilities (including host language proficiency) that are needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself (Fantini, 2012).

5. Conclusion

This research investigated student self-reported English proficiency, exposure mediums to Anglophone culture(s), motivational factors to study in a transnational college in English, and how these mediums and motivational factors differ between the three study levels. The results indicate significant differences in student self-reported knowledge regarding Anglophone culture(s) that is correlated to the year of study, which suggests students are influenced by the inclusion of cultural material in their UG courses and forming a community of practice. This is also reflected in a shift in the main medium of cultural exposure from media in L1 to the university in L3. Overall, the students in this study perceived that learning about social interactions and popular Anglophone culture(s) would help them to improve their language learning.

The bigger challenge is to develop curricula and courses based on cultural material that will motivate students to learn English without denying the primacy in their lives of their own cultures. Given that the study results suggest that students become interested in college (English) culture as they proceed through their courses, there is a strong case for devising lessons on aspects of scientific behavior culture in ESP STEM courses. Furthermore, study materials can be developed by educators to include ESC references related to the content, which will not only improve the understanding of the material, but also make it more engaging and support the development of English language, including its usage

and context. To understand the dynamics and implications of this shift from learning and wanting to learn through popular culture to an understanding of the school/college as culture (if indeed something similar is found to exist in other contexts), more research is required.

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Appendix: TurningPoint Live Survey Questionnaires

(A) Questionnaire in English Language

1. Which level of study are you currently completing at university?
 - a. Level 1
 - b. Level 2
 - c. Level 3

2. To what degree would you describe your knowledge and understanding of English speaking cultures?
 - a. I have a thorough understanding of English-speaking cultures
 - b. I have a general understanding of English-speaking cultures
 - c. I know some aspects of English-speaking cultures
 - d. I know a little about English-speaking cultures
 - e. I don't know about English-speaking cultures

3. Which English speaking cultures are you most familiar with?
 - a. American
 - b. British
 - c. Australian and/or New Zealand
 - d. American and British
 - e. Other

4. What has been your main exposure to English speaking cultures?
 - a. TV shows and movies
 - b. Internet
 - c. School/University
 - d. Travelling to English speaking countries
 - e. Other

5. How does your knowledge and understanding of English-speaking cultures affect your understanding of English language?
 - a. It helps me greatly
 - b. It helps me to some degree
 - c. It doesn't affect my understanding
 - d. It limits my understanding to some degree
 - e. It greatly limits my understanding

6. How does your exposure to English speaking cultures affect your learning of English?
 - a. It helps my learning greatly
 - b. It helps my learning to some degree
 - c. It doesn't help my learning
 - d. It limits my learning to a certain degree
 - e. It greatly limits my learning

7. To what degree would you describe your knowledge of the English language?
 - a. Excellent knowledge
 - b. Very good knowledge
 - c. Good knowledge
 - d. Fair knowledge
 - e. Beginner

8. Which English skills are you confident in?
 - a. Reading, writing, and speaking
 - b. Reading and writing only
 - c. Reading and speaking only
 - d. Speaking only
 - e. Reading only

9. Do you think that having more knowledge of English-speaking cultures would affect your learning of English?

- a. It would help my learning greatly
- b. It would help my learning to some degree
- c. It wouldn't help my learning
- d. It would limit my learning to a certain degree
- e. It would greatly limit my learning

10. In your opinion, what aspects of English-speaking cultures would help you to improve your English? Choose one.

- a. Knowledge of social interactions in English speaking cultures
- b. Knowledge of religion in English speaking cultures
- c. Knowledge of popular culture in English speaking cultures
- d. Knowledge of beliefs in English speaking cultures
- e. Knowledge of politics in English speaking cultures

11. What is your current IELTS English level?

- a. <5.5
- b. Between 5.5 and 6.0
- c. Between 6.0 and 7.0
- d. Between 7.0 and 8.0
- e. > than 8.0

12. Which of the following do you believe motivated you to study a science degree taught in English? (You can select more than one item)

- ☐ Encouraged by family members, friends or teachers
- ☐ Better postgraduate study opportunities in China
- ☐ Better postgraduate study opportunities internationally
- ☐ Better career opportunities in China
- ☐ Better career opportunities internationally
- ☐ To understand English culture better
- ☐ University ranking
- ☐ To be able to speak English fluently
- ☐ To study science in the most commonly accepted scientific language
- ☐ To have the chance to visit the UK during your study
- ☐ It is very fashionable to study an English degree these days

(B) Questionnaire in Chinese Language

1. 你目前完成了大学哪一阶段的学习？
 - A. 大一
 - B. 大二
 - C. 大三

2. 你对于英语为母语的背景文化的了解程度是？
 - A. 我完全了解英语为母语的 cultural 背景知识。
 - B. 我大概了解英语为母语的 cultural 背景知识。
 - C. 我了解某些方面关于英语为母语的 cultural 背景知识。
 - D. 我了解一点英语为母语的 cultural 背景知识。
 - E. 我不了解英语为母语的 cultural 背景知识。

3. 你最熟悉的英语为母语的 cultural 背景知识是哪里？
 - A. 美国的。
 - B. 英国的。
 - C. 澳大利亚和/或新西兰的。
 - D. 美国和英国的。
 - E. 其他

4. 你最常通过什么方式接触英语 cultural 背景知识？
 - A. 电视和电影。
 - B. 网络。
 - C. 学校或大学。
 - D. 通过对英语为母语国家的旅游。
 - E. 其他

5. 你认为英语为母语的 cultural 背景知识如何影响你对于英语的了解？
 - A. 它帮助了我很多。
 - B. 它一定程度上帮助了我。
 - C. 它对我没有帮助。
 - D. 它一定程度上限制了我对英语的了解。
 - E. 它极大程度上限制了我对英语的了解。

6. 你认为英语为母语的 cultural 背景知识如何影响你的英语学习？
 - A. 它更好地帮助了我的学习。
 - B. 它一定程度上帮助了我的学习。

C.它对我的学习没有帮助。

D.它一定程度上限制了我的学习。

E.它极大程度上限制了我的学习。

7.你对英语知识的了解程度是？

A.极好。

B.非常好。

C.好。

D.一般。

E.初学者水平。

8.你最擅长的英语技能是？

A.阅读，写作和口语。

B.阅读和写作。

C.阅读和口语。

D.口语。

E.阅读。

9.你认为学习更多的英语为母语的文化背景知识对于学习英语有什么影响？

A.它很好地帮助了我的学习。

B.它在某些程度上帮助了我的学习。

C.它对我的学习没有帮助。

D.它在一定程度上限制了我的学习。

E.它在极大程度上限制了我的学习。

10.你认为哪方面的英语为母语的文化背景知识会提高你的英语学习？只选一项。

A.社会活动方面的知识。

B.宗教方面的知识。

C.流行文化方面的知识。

D.信仰方面的知识。

E.政治方面的知识。

11.你当前的雅思英语水平处于？

A.小于5.5。

B.5.5 到6.0 之间。

C.6.0 到7.0 之间。

D.7.0 到8.0 之间。

E.大于8.0

12.下面哪些选项会激励你用英语授课的方式学习科学知识？可多选。

- ☐.家庭、朋友和老师的鼓励。
- ☐.在中国更好的研究生学习机会。
- ☐.在国外更好的研究生学习机会。
- ☐.在中国更好的就业机会。
- ☐.在国外更好的就业机会。
- ☐.为了更好地了解英语文化。
- ☐.大学排名。
- ☐.为了流利地说英语。
- ☐.以最普遍接受的科学语言学习科学。
- ☐.为了在学习之余有机会游览英国。
- ☐.拿英语文凭很流行。