Changes in the Motivation of Chinese ESL Learners: A Qualitative Investigation

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Abstract

This article reports on a case study that investigated changes in the motivation of Chinese ESL learners over a three month period of residence in an English-speaking environment. The participants consisted of 11 Chinese ESL learners, who were tertiary students and taking general or academic English courses in New Zealand. They took part in the present research shortly after their arrival in New Zealand. Data were collected over a period of three months using qualitative data collection instruments such as learner diaries and individual interviews. The results revealed some dynamic changes in the motivation of Chinese ESL learners over a three month period of residence in an English-speaking country. According to the similarities and differences in their motivation, they were categorized into five learner types. In general, the learners belonging to the first three types were able to maintain or increase their overall motivation. The learners in the last two types were not able to maintain their overall motivation: Their motivation decreased over the three months.

1. Introduction

The current literature on second or foreign language (L2) learning motivation emphasizes that L2 motivation is dynamic and changes over time during the L2 learning process. The motivation of L2 learners is affected by a number of contextual variables such as learners' immediate learning environment and social and linguistic milieu (e.g., Clément & Kruidenier, 1983; Csizér, Kormos, & Sarkadi, 2010; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Gardner, 1985). These factors (i.e., learners' immediate learning environment and social and linguistic milieu) may cause fluctuation in the intensity of L2 motivation during the L2 learning process. Since L2 motivation is dynamic and changes all the time as a result of learners' learning experiences (Ellis, 2004), there was a need to examine how the experience of learning an L2 in both school and in more naturalistic contexts (i.e., when learners live in the target language environment) causes dynamic changes in learners' L2 motivation. The present study intended to attempt this. Moreover, most previous studies on motivational change only compared quantitative data collected by means of questionnaires at two distant points in time (e.g., Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant, & Mihic, 2004; Inbar, Donitsa-Schmidt, & Shohamy, 2001), and as a result may fail to capture ongoing changes in L2 motivation. Therefore, a more qualitative research approach has been considered more appropriate for investigating the dynamic and temporal dimensions of L2 motivation (e.g., Csizér et al., 2010; Dörnyei, 2009b; Ushioda, 2001). Recently, some researchers have attempted to investigate the dynamics of language learning motivation from a complex dynamic systems (CDS) perspective (see Dörnyei, MacIntyre & Henry, 2015; Nitta & Baba, 2015; for comprehensive reviews of CDS) by employing qualitative methods such as interviews (e.g., Bambirra, 2016; You & Chan, 2015). In addition to interview techniques, Crookes and Schmidt (1991) suggested that diary studies may offer a better way to explore the dynamics of motivational factors and provide interesting insights by learners themselves into motivational factors. However, few empirical studies have used diaries to investigate the ongoing changes of L2 motivation over time. The aim of the present study is to explore how Chinese ESL learners' English learning experiences during a three month period of residence in an English-speaking environment influence their motivation and lead to motivational changes. For this purpose, the researcher conducted a qualitative diary study with 11 Chinese ESL learners to track them over time in their school and naturalistic settings during a three month period of residence in New Zealand. This in-depth investigation of Chinese ESL learners' experiences and perceptions of learning English in New Zealand provided insights from

the learners themselves into dynamic changes in their motivation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 L2 Motivation Model – L2 Motivational Self System

In order to explain the L2 motivational construct in diverse language learning contexts and the motivational basis of language globalization, Dörnyei (2005) proposed the L2 Motivational Self System, which builds on the findings in previous self research concerning possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), ideal and ought selves in relation to self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987) and L2 motivation research relating to integrativeness (Gardner & Masgoret, 2003). The L2 Motivational Self System is composed of three dimensions: Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience. Ideal L2 Self refers to 'the L2-specific facet of one's "ideal self"', which can strongly motivate L2 learners to learn the L2 because they desire to 'reduce the discrepancy' between their 'actual and ideal selves' if the person they would like to become is a speaker of an L2. Traditional integrative motives and internalized instrumental motives (i.e., instrumental motives with a promotion focus) typically belong to this component. Ought-to L2 Self refers to the attributes that L2 learners believe they 'ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes'. This dimension corresponds to the less internalized types of instrumental motives (i.e., instrumental motives with a prevention focus). L2 Learning Experience refers to 'situated, "executive" motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g., the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success)' (Dörnyei, 2009a, p.29). Recent studies have provided support for the tripartite L2 Motivational Self System and showed that it has the capacity to explain the L2 motivational construct in different learning contexts and the motivational basis of language globalization (e.g., Lamb, 2012; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009; Yashima, 2009). Thus, the researcher employed it as the theoretical framework of the present study to investigate changes in the motivation of Chinese learners who are learning World English in an English-speaking environment for three months.

2.2 L2 Motivational Change

Most existing studies investigating motivational change focus on how L2 learners' motivation is influenced by the L2 courses they take in school contexts and employ a quantitative approach. According to Dörnyei (2001), 'the downside of quantitative methods is that they average out responses across the whole sample or subsample, and by working with concepts of averages it is impossible to do justice to the subjective variety of an individual life' (p. 193). Csizér et al. (2010) pointed out that it is very important to carry out qualitative studies in order to explore the dynamic and fluctuating nature of language learning motivation. In accordance with his conceptualization of L2 motivation from a self perspective, Dörnyei (2005) suggested that motivational change may involve the elaboration of the ideal L2 self and the internalization of the ought-to L2 self. He referred to the ideal L2 self as incorporating the learner's membership of an imagined L2 community. Recently, Dörnyei et al. (2015) argued that the various L2 self-guides are by nature inherently dynamic and therefore suited for investigation applying CDS principles. Some researchers have utilized the dynamic systems approach as a research tool to investigate motivational change and focused on the idiosyncratic developmental trajectories of individuals, rather than just identifying an averaged representation of development across L2 learners. Consequently, a small number of studies have been conducted to qualitatively investigate the actual developmental processes of individuals' self-guides from a CDS perspective. For example, You and Chan (2015) suggested that L2 self-guides are not static and likely to change during the process of L2 learning. Nitta and Baba (2015) investigated how the ideal L2 selves of two particular students develop over time through repeated engagements in classroom-based tasks by using self-regulation as a construct for characterising L2 learning experience. They found that the ideal L2 self evolves co-adaptively with the development of self-regulation. Thus, they 'conceptualised the relationship between the ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience as being co-adaptive within the context of the EFL classroom, displaying interrelated changes' (p. 401).

Since it is assumed that the experience of learning an L2 can influence a learner's motivation, besides L2 courses in school contexts, experience of contact with the L2 community can also bring about changes in attitudes and motivation toward L2 learning (Gardner, 1985). That is, more naturalistic contexts (i.e., when learners live in the target language environment) can also cause changes in L2 motivation. Using a mixed-methods package, Irie and Ryan (2015) investigated the role that study abroad experiences play in the learners' L2 motivation and in the development of their L2 self-concept. They referred to their participants as the naïve optimist before departure because at that time all the participants shared a viewpoint that English learning success seems to be assured and successfully learning English will make them become a better person. However, after around five months overseas, three different learner types were identified among them: shell-shocked doubter, comfortable user, and

duty-bound learner. The most dramatic and important change observed was the shift from naïve optimist to shell-shocked doubter. This type of learners had negative study abroad experiences and thus their initial optimism and enthusiasm in learning English completely disappeared, being replaced by the desperate feeling of being unable to learn English successfully. In contrast, the comfortable user appeared to have the ideal and most productive study abroad experiences. This type of learners felt confident and comfortable as both a learner and user of English abroad as they had anticipated prior to departure. Compared to the comfortable user, the duty-bound learner struggled with the study abroad experiences, but was not as desperate as the shell-shocked doubter. Although they did not give up learning English, they seemed to learn English in order to meet their perceived obligations (e.g., not to let others down), rather than for their own belief and purpose. However, empirical studies that have qualitatively investigated motivational change in more naturalistic contexts are still scanty. The present study is an effort in this direction. Using the L2 Motivational Self System as its theoretical framework, it attempted to investigate changes in the motivation of Chinese learners who are learning World English in an English-speaking environment for three months by means of qualitative methods (i.e., diaries and interviews). The following research questions were formulated:

(1) What are the factors that influence the motivation of Chinese ESL learners?

(2) How do these motivational factors change over a three month period of residence in an English-speaking environment?

(3) How do the motivational changes differ among Chinese ESL learners?

3. Method

3.1 Context and Participants

The research reported in this article is part of a multiple-method study investigating the motivation of Chinese learners of English. The participants in the research were 11 Chinese ESL learners who were tertiary students and taking general or academic English courses at four language schools in New Zealand. They were randomly selected from a group of Chinese ESL learners who took part in a motivation survey of the multiple-method study and had recently arrived in New Zealand and lived in New Zealand for less than one month. Normally, only a small number of new Chinese students enrolled in the same month in a language school, so the selection of the group of Chinese ESL learners was done by an opportunity/convenience sampling method and they were recruited at eight language schools, from which the researcher could obtain permission to approach their students as an independent researcher. All the participants agreed to take part in the present research by filling out and signing a consent form. They were invited to keep a diary of their English learning over a three month period shortly after their arrival in New Zealand. A period of three months was set for the investigation because most of Chinese ESL learners studied at a language school for at least three months after arriving in New Zealand. None of the participants had been to any other English-speaking country. The background information of the participants is presented in Table 1. All the participants' names were changed to preserve anonymity.

Table 1. 11 participants' personal background information

Name	Age	Gender	Years of learning English	English proficiency level (according to self-rating scale, Taguchi et al., 2009)	Homestay experiences
Hui	21	F	10	Intermediate	No
Wen	23	M	11	Intermediate	No
Feng	22	F	8	Post-Beginner	Yes
Wendy	20	F	7	Post-Beginner	Yes
Qing	20	M	7	Intermediate	Yes
Lai	24	M	9	Intermediate	Yes
Ling	24	F	12	Lower Intermediate	Yes
Yu	23	F	8	Intermediate	Yes
Sarah	25	F	10	Intermediate	Yes
Jie	22	F	9	Post-Beginner	Yes
Jun	23	M	8	Post-Beginner	Yes

3.2 Data Collection

This study employed learner diaries and interviews to collect data, which are rich and detailed and offer good insights into personal experiences and behaviour. In this study 11 ESL learners kept a diary over a three month period to record their experiences and perceptions of learning English, especially their reflections on their motivation, attitudes, and beliefs in learning English. At the beginning, they were given a set of instructions about how to keep their diaries and what to write. The instructions were designed by referring to previous diary studies (e.g., Bailey, 1990; Carter, 2006). In the instructions, the participants were given some guidelines about possible topics for their diary entries (e.g., reasons for learning English, time and effort put into learning English, progress in improving English proficiency, feelings toward English learning, communication in English and learning situations, English learning experiences, etc.). The instrument was piloted with another five ESL learners, and a few minor modifications were made to the instructions after piloting. The participants were encouraged to use Chinese to write their entries, with a minimum requirement of one entry per week. Their entries were collected weekly. Finally, seven participants used Chinese to write all their diary entries, and four wrote their diary entries in a mixture of Chinese and English. The English grammar is not corrected for the diary entries originally written in English.

Since keeping a diary might raise the learners' awareness of their own motivation and learning experiences, interviews were the supplement to learner diaries. Loosely structured interviews were conducted with the participants individually at the end of each month. The interviews, which were like informal conversations with the participants, were conducted in the participants' first language, Chinese. In the interviews, the researcher guided the respondents through a set of questions, which were different for different respondents. The guide questions were constructed on the basis of the content of their diary entries and used to encourage them to explain and clarify some items in their diary entries in more details and depth. Each interview took approximately 20 – 30 minutes. All the interviews were audio-recorded with a digital recorder and broadly transcribed after each interview.

3.3 Data Analysis

The diary entries and interview transcripts were analyzed employing an interpretive approach (Henry, 2015; Smith & Eatough, 2007). First, the researcher got familiar with the data by reading through each learner's entries and transcripts, making notes and identifying important points especially relating to the various factors that influenced each leaner's English learning motivation. Then, the researcher searched the data carefully for the themes; that is, on the basis of L2 Motivational Self System theory, the researcher changed the initial notes and points into theoretical themes, particularly identifying examples indicating possible changes in motivational factors. Finally, the collections of themes were examined to see how they were related to each other. Categories were then identified. A set of similar themes was grouped together into a category and the relationships between the categories and the similarities and differences across the learners were further examined. In order to achieve trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis in this study, an additional coder helped the researcher with the coding. After she finished coding the data independently, the researcher compared her coding with the researcher's original coding and discussed with her where there were discrepancies. Finally, they reconciled the disagreed coding and came to total agreement about the coding of each category.

The example below illustrates how the data were analyzed and coded. This is an extract from Ling's diary:

It is my first time to make a magazine and learn language through cooperating with my classmates, collecting resources about my topics and writing my articles. At the same time, I can practice all my listening, speaking, reading, and writing by the activity. I enjoy the way to study.

This unit of data was coded as 'positive attitudes to the English course' because it indicated that Ling showed a positive disposition toward her English course. Data with this theme were then placed into the category of 'L2 learning experiences' which covered data that represented the themes related to the feelings that the participants had toward their immediate English learning environment and experiences.

4. Results

4.1 Motivational Factors

The analysis of the diary and interview data identified four broad categories related to the motivation of Chinese ESL learners: (1) Ideal L2 self, (2) Ought-to L2 self, (3) L2 learning experiences, and (4) Motivated learning behaviour.

4.1.1 Ideal L2 Self

This category involved the participants' dream or vision of themselves as competent users of English, internalized instrumental motives (i.e., personal goals such as: academic/professional advancement and accomplishment, desire to study, work or live abroad, communicative need, making foreign friends, and knowledge orientation), and desire to identify with the global English-speaking community. Among the 11 participants, six (i.e., Ling, Qing, Yu, Sarah, Feng, and Jie) had a sense of English as part of their ideal self; that is, they had an ideal L2 self.

4.1.2 Ought-to L2 Self

Except for Jun, all the participants had a salient and stable ought-to L2 self because they always thought that they ought to study English to avoid negative outcomes and to meet others' expectations or their perceived obligations (e.g., take responsibility for their family, pass an English course or exam, and not fall behind their peers).

4.1.3 L2 Learning Experiences

This category comprised the participants' feelings toward their immediate English learning environment and experiences (i.e., English course, English teacher, fellow students in class, current English learning environment outside the classroom). All the participants commented on positive or negative attitudes to learning English both inside and outside the classroom.

4.1.4 Motivated Learning Behaviour

This category concerned the participants' actual and/or intended English learning effort. All the participants described the amount of effort that they put and/or intended to put into learning English.

4.2 Changes in the Motivational Factors

4.2.1 No Changes in Ideal or Ought-to L2 Self

The participants' ideal L2 selves did not change over the three months. For example, Jie expressed twice in the first and third month respectively, 'How I wish one day I could speak English fluently and communicate with others in English with ease. This is what I dream every day.' Besides Jie, Qing, Yu, Feng, and Ling either repeatedly indicated that they dreamed one day they could become competent users of English, or how they admired someone who was a successful L2 speaker. In addition, Ling, Qing, Yu, Sarah, Jie and Feng always mentioned that they studied English in order to achieve at least one of the above personal goals which seemed promotional, and no one showed any change in their goals for learning English over the three month period of residence in New Zealand. A typical example is Sarah who mentioned seven times that she studied English mainly because she wanted to study for a Master's degree at a good university and then find a good job after graduation. For example, she wrote in her first diary entry:

I study English here mainly because I want to apply for a Master's program at a good university. Up to now I've still stuck to this goal. […] In China, there are fierce competitions for jobs. […] In order to find a satisfactory job, I must have an advanced degree. In order to enter a well-known university here to study for a Master's degree, I must study English well.

In the third month, she still emphasized, 'My reasons for learning English haven't changed. I feel there is a need, or I should say, it is really important for me to learn English in order to further my education and find a good job.'

According to Dörnyei (2009a), 'if the person that we would like to become is proficient in the L2, we can be described in Gardner's (1985) terminology as having an integrative disposition' (p. 27). However, although they would ideally like to become a person who is proficient in English, they could not be simply described as having a desire to integrate with native speakers of English. Qing, Ling, and Yu only showed their favourable attitudes toward their homestay family members. It appears that the relationships between them and their homestay family members promoted interaction between them. They identified themselves as members of the homestay families, which gave them the right to speak (Norton Peirce, 1995) English at home. In contrast to them, Jie did not seem to have happy homestay experiences during the three months. She summarized her feelings in the third month: 'I don't like Kiwis [New Zealanders]…' It seems that Jie's unhappy homestay experiences made her form negative attitudes to members of the English-speaking community. However, she repeatedly mentioned that she liked to contact and socialize with English learners from other countries and other non-native English speakers: 'I want to make friends with my schoolmates from other countries. They are very friendly,' which made her feel learning English was purposeful. She seemed to link English with a global English-speaking community rather than with

a particular English-speaking community (i.e., local New Zealanders). She identified herself as a member of the global English-speaking community. Similarly, the other two learners, Sarah and Feng, also showed positive attitudes to the global English-speaking community all the time and identified themselves as members of it, as Dörnyei (2005) has suggested happens with some learners. In this sense, their ideal L2 self images might be related to members of the international English-speaking community rather than to members of a particular English-speaking community.

In general, no one showed any change in their ought-to L2 selves over the three months. For example, they all mentioned every month that passing IELTS was the most important reason for their English learning. Hui mentioned this theme eight times. Sample comments in chronological order include:

I will study English hard because I plan to take IELTS.

Now I am starting to prepare for IELTS. […] I hope I can learn English well so that I can pass IELTS.

Next Monday we'll have a monthly test. I hope I can get a better score. After all, I will take IELTS soon. Actually, now I am studying English under some pressures because I need to take IELTS.

I am studying English hard now because I don't want to fail in IELTS.

Moreover, Feng, Yu, Hui, Wen, and Wendy repeatedly stated that their parents paid a lot for their tuition in order to let them study English in New Zealand, so they must try their best to study it well and could not let their parents down. Feng, Ling, Sarah, and Jie always considered pressures from peers as a motivator to learn English because they did not want to fall behind their peers or be considered a weak student (i.e., lose face) in learning English. For example, Ling summarized in the third month, 'I often feel lots of pressure from other classmates because most of them are very good at speaking and listening and their vocabulary are also large. I already have done my best to study in order to catch up with them.'

4.2.2 Some Changes in L2 Learning Experiences and Motivated Learning Behaviour

Hui, Feng, Ling, Yu, Wen and Wendy showed positive shifts in their attitudes to the English course or English teacher over the three months. For example, in her diary in the first month, Hui expressed both positive and negative attitudes to the English course. She wrote, '[…], but grammar is also taught in this school. […] Besides grammar, what we practice most is spoken English. Actually, I feel it good to learn English like this.' However, sometimes she still complained about her English class: 'This Wednesday morning we spent all the time doing grammar exercises. It was very boring. I felt very tired of it.' Later, in the second and third month, she only repeatedly expressed positive attitudes to the English course. The other five participants always showed positive attitudes to the English course or English teacher over the three months.

Besides the school contexts, eight participants (i.e., Qing, Hui, Lai, Sarah, Feng, Ling, Yu, and Jun) repeatedly expressed positive attitudes to the current English learning environment outside the classroom because they thought that when living in New Zealand they had opportunities to use English in their daily life, which was helpful for them to learn English. However, Wen, Jie, and Wendy always felt that they had too much contact with Chinese even though they lived in New Zealand and the English learning environment was not as good as they had anticipated. For example, Wen concluded in the third month, 'I speak Chinese more than English after class. […] If you can't speak English, you still can live here [in Auckland] very well, so I think the living environment is not good for studying English. It can't help me to improve my English.' It seems that their attitudes to the current English learning environment outside the classroom depended on whether they were satisfied with the quantity and quality of their social contact with English in their daily life. In this case, Wen, Jie, and Wendy had negative English learning experiences.

Moreover, eight participants could sustain their involvement in learning English and showed an increase or no change in the amount of English learning effort. The following examples are Hui's comments in chronological order:

I need to memorize more English words. […], so I'll study harder and put more effort into memorizing English words.

I want to memorize English words every day from now on.

The very good thing is that I have recently studied harder and not skipped a class. But last month I skipped several classes.

I intend to go to the library to study English and prepare IELTS after school every day from next week […].

I feel this week I studied English much harder than before. Every day I went to the library after school. I feel it

not bad to study there because I could study more attentively there than at home.

Hui's comments showed a positive change in her English learning effort over the three months. Similar to Hui, Feng, Ling, and Yu also indicated that the amount of effort they put into learning English increased over time. For example, Yu concluded in the third month, '[…] so I expend more effort and time in learning English than before. I need to memorize larger vocabulary and can't laze away my time any more.' The other four participants (i.e., Qing, Lai, Sarah, and Jie) did not seem to show any change in their English learning effort over the three months. They all indicated that they worked hard at English all the time. For example, Jie commented several times, 'Every day I spend a lot of time studying English after school, such as doing assignments and revising what I have learned.'

However, three participants (i.e., Wendy, Wen, and Jun) showed negative shifts in their English learning effort over the three months. For example, Wendy concluded in the third month that she could not sustain her involvement in learning English and the amount of effort she put into learning English decreased over the three months:

I spent more time and energy learning English when I just came here because at that time I thought English was very important when living in New Zealand. However, after living here for a period of time, I found, in fact, I seldom needed to speak English in my daily life. So I become lazier and spend less time on English. […] After school, I seldom study English, except spending about half an hour doing my assignment.

Wen also commented in the third month, 'Now I must admit I can't maintain my initial momentum of learning English.' Jun expressed several times that he started to work part-time in a Chinese restaurant after living in New Zealand for about a month, which occupied much of his spare time, so he spent less time and effort learning English. Although Jun and Wen expressed in the first month that they intended to study English diligently, in the third month they still admitted that they did not put as much effort into learning English as before because more distractions interfered with their English learning after they had lived in New Zealand for a couple of months and become familiar with the surroundings.

4.3 Differences in the Motivational Changes among Chinese ESL Learners

According to the similarities and differences in their motivational factors, the 11 learners can be categorized into five learner types with different idiosyncratic motivational trajectories.

Five learners (i.e., Ling, Qing, Yu, Sarah, and Feng) belong to the first type, who had an ideal L2 self, an ought-to L2 self, and positive L2 learning experiences. In general, their ideal and ought-to L2 selves remained stable during the three months. However, Ling, Yu, and Feng demonstrated positive changes in attitudes to the English course and/or English teacher; that is, they showed positive shifts in their classroom learning experiences as time passed. Accordingly, Ling, Yu, and Feng demonstrated positive changes in their English learning effort, and Qing and Sarah were able to sustain their involvement in learning English. By definition motivation is the antecedent of motivated behaviour (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005), so motivated learning behaviour reflects the level of overall motivation to learn English. That is, the learners in the first group were able to maintain or even increase their overall motivation.

Two learners (i.e, Hui and Lai) belong to the second type, who had an ought-to L2 self and positive L2 learning experiences, but no ideal L2 self. They had a stable ought-to L2 self. Since they had not yet internalized the instrumentality to the extent that it became part of their ideal selves, they had no ideal L2 self. Hui showed positive changes in her classroom learning experiences and increased the effort she spent learning English. Lai sustained his involvement in learning English. This suggests that even though they lacked a developed ideal L2 self, they were still able to maintain or even increase their overall motivation.

One learner (i.e., Jie) belongs to the third type, who had an ideal L2 self, an ought-to L2 self, but some negative L2 learning experiences. Her ideal and ought-to L2 self did not change over the three months. However, she only socialized with Chinese and other non-native English speakers and had limited contact with native English speakers outside the classroom, which made her feel that she was deprived of opportunities to practice English in her daily life even though she lived in an English-speaking environment. Although she had some negative English learning experiences, she was still able to maintain her goal commitment in that the amount of effort she put into learning English remained constant.

One learner (i.e., Jun) belongs to the fourth type, who had positive L2 learning experiences, but no ideal or ought-to L2 self. Jun was the only student who did not mention any goals or future perspectives for learning English. According to Dörnyei (2005), 'the Ideal and the Ought-to L2 Selves are by definition teleological, concerning future motivational perspectives (as they concern imagined future end-states)' (p.106). Since Jun did

not link English with his future, he might not have developed an ideal or ought-to L2 self. Moreover, he demonstrated negative changes in his English learning effort even though he always had positive learning experiences and thus could not maintain his overall motivation.

Two learners (i.e, Wen and Wendy) belong to the fifth type, who had an ought-to L2 self, but no ideal L2 self, and some negative L2 learning experiences. Their ought-to L2 selves did not change over the three months. However, they demonstrated negative changes in their English learning effort. Similarly, in Lamb's (2007) Indonesian case study, he found that those who lack an ideal L2 self still have a strong ought-to L2 self, but seem to be more easily discouraged by negative L2 learning experiences and reluctant to take advantage of opportunities to speak L2. Therefore, they were not able to maintain their overall motivation.

5. Discussion

Overall the findings of this study provide support for the tripartite L2 Motivational Self System. The L2 self-guides of the Chinese ESL learners were closely related to their instrumental motives. It seems that most of them took it for granted that they studied English in order to take IELTS, further their education, find a job, and take responsibility for their family. This is not surprising considering their Chinese/Confucian cultural background and the importance of English in Chinese society. For example, studying English for the sake of academic or professional advancement and accomplishment has become a common view of Chinese people. If the learners internalized the instrumental motives because they regarded them as meeting their own needs rather than just meeting others' (e.g., their parents') expectations or conforming to common social norms, the instrumental motives (i.e., academic/professional advancement and accomplishment, desire to study, work or live abroad, communicative need, making foreign friends, and knowledge orientation) became part of their ideal L2 self. However, if the learners did not internalize the instrumentality or incorporate it into their ideal self, these non-internalized instrumental motives with a prevention focus such as studying English in order to take responsibility for their family, to pass an English course or exam, and not to fall behind their peers, are part of their ought self (Dörnyei, 2009a).

During this three month period, the learners' ideal and ought-to L2 selves remained relatively stable. Considering the short length of residence in an English-speaking country, the result is reasonable since their reasons and goals of learning English are deeply rooted in Chinese culture. However, they demonstrated changes in their overall motivation because their L2 motivation was influenced by the combination of three factors and the third component, English learning experiences, changed. This seems to correspond to the finding of Gardner et al.'s (2004) study that changes are most likely to occur in attitudes toward the learning situation and are less likely in integrativeness and instrumental orientation. Lamb (2007) also found that 'general variables such as instrumental and integrative orientations are less susceptible to change than classroom-related variables' (p. 770). In addition, when investigating motivational change from a dynamic systems approach, Piniel and Csizér (2015) found that the participants in their study seem to have a strong internalized vision of themselves as users of English in the future; that is, the ideal L2 self remains stable. However, this vision does not entirely protect them from negative learning experiences; that is, learning experience is susceptible to change. In contrast to the findings of the present study, in their study the ought-to L2 self changes. Therefore, they assumed that 'the more internalized parts of the selves are more resistant to change' (p. 196). They also indicated that a longer period of investigation would yield a more intricate picture of change.

The five types of learners identified in this study differed in the motivational patterns, that is, the three components of the L2 Motivational Self System. These three components interacted to influence the learners' overall motivation to learn English. Therefore, there were differences in their motivational changes. The learners in the first type are similar to the comfortable user in Irie and Ryan's (2015) study. They had ideal and productive learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom, always felt confident and comfortable as both a learner and user of English, and believed that learning English well would make them become a better person. Thus, they were able to maintain their initial motivational state or increase their overall motivation over time. Compared to them, the second type of learners had no ideal L2 self, but still could maintain or even increase their motivation. This suggests that positive learning experiences together with a strong ought-to L2 self ensured the motivation to learn English. However, this does not mean that the ideal L2 self is the least important motivational factor. If the learners had developed an ideal L2 self, they were able to maintain their overall motivation even though they had negative learning experiences (i.e., Type 3). Campbell and Storch (2011) also found that if a learner has an ideal L2 self that remains unchanged and stable, the demotivation caused by negative learning experiences and contextual factors can be unreal. Similarly, Lamb's (2007) study also showed that the sharpening vision of a future English-speaking self enables the students to overcome some negative learning experiences and sustain their efforts in learning in the long run. Piniel and Csizér's (2015) found that

their participants have future visions of how to proceed with their English learning, and their ideal L2 selves and learning behaviour remain stable even when they meet with difficulties.

The learners in the fifth type also had negative learning experiences, but their overall motivation decreased over the three months. A possible explanation is that without an ideal L2 self, their ought-to L2 selves were not able to sustain their involvement in learning English, given their negative learning experiences. This confirms Dörnyei's (2005) argument that non-internalized instrumental motives associated with the ought self are not likely to provide the sustained commitment needed for mastery of an L2. The ought-to L2 self has less power to positively influence learning behaviour than the ideal L2 self (Lamb, 2007). The ideal and ought-to L2 selves were not able to shield the learners from negative learning experiences. However, without an ideal or ought-to L2 self, the learner in the fourth type (i.e., Jun) could not maintain his motivation even though he always had positive learning experiences. A possible reason for the decrease in his motivation is that Jun did not have clear goals or future perspectives for learning English, namely an ideal or ought-to L2 self, and thus was not able to overcome the difficulties and distractions that interfered with his English learning. When he met these difficulties and distractions, he could not maintain the original momentum and his overall motivation was likely to decrease even though he had positive learning experiences. This confirms Dörnyei's (2009a) argument that not everyone is expected to have an ideal or ought-to self guide (Higgins, 1987, 1996), which can explain the lack of sufficient motivation in many people.

6. Conclusions and Implications

The qualitative data provided a number of interesting comments on how the Chinese ESL learners saw their own experiences and processes of learning English in an English-speaking environment. The in-depth analysis of the learners' inner voices revealed the factors that influenced their motivation and the changes in their motivation. This confirms that L2 motivation is dynamic, changes over time during the L2 learning process, and is influenced by the experiences of learning an L2 in both school and in more naturalistic contexts (i.e., when learners live in the target language environment).

The findings of this study revealed five types of Chinese ESL learners according to their motivational profiles, which may inform ESL educators and have implications for pedagogical intervention. Identifying the motivational profiles of different ESL students may help ESL teachers to effectively motivate their students or train their students to motivate themselves in that they can design and apply specific motivational strategies targeting at individual students in different learner types. For example, for ESL learners lacking an ideal L2 self, in order to help them to develop, sustain and elaborate their ideal L2 selves, teachers can help them to find powerful role models for their potential future language selves, encourage them to seek opportunities to communicate in English in their daily life, remind them of potential problems that may arise when interacting with native English speakers due to cultural differences and teach them how to deal with these, cultivate their positive attitudes toward the English-speaking community and its culture, and help them to construct relationships to the globalized world as English learners and speakers. It is also imperative that teachers help students to set up and internalize their goals for learning English instead of just focusing on passing exams. Moreover, the results of this study showed that for the ESL learners, the experiences of learning English in naturalistic contexts played an important role in their motivation. Without positive learning experiences outside the classroom, they may not maintain their overall motivation. This suggests that teachers may need to help students learn more about the English culture and the local culture, customs, and life styles, give them suggestions about how to socialize with native English speakers and other non-native English speakers, and help them build self-confidence in communicating in English. Teachers can provide students with training in the use of self-regulatory strategies such as self-motivating strategies, which students can use to control their own motivation, especially in the face of various personal and/or environmental distractions.

It should be noted that this study has several limitations in terms of scale and context. The qualitative findings are not generalizable, but may be transferable to other ESL learners with the similar experiences in different learning contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study collected qualitative data for only three months and found that the ESL learners' ideal and ought-to L2 selves remained relatively stable over a three month period of residence in an English-speaking environment. It is interesting to find whether changes in the ideal and ought-to L2 self will happen if ESL learners live in an English-speaking environment for a longer period of time. Therefore, in order to examine dynamic changes in motivational factors, especially in future self-guides, it would be useful for further studies to track learners over a longer period of time. The diary approach used in this study would be an effective way of undertaking this although it has the limitation that the diary tool itself might potentially influence learners' motivation. Therefore, it is important for further research to use a range of methodologies. In addition to traditional qualitative methods, adopting a CDS approach is promising in the

investigation of the dynamics of motivational change.

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