

**Student Motivation for Studying English  
for Academic Purposes Courses in an  
Offshore Program in China**

**A thesis submitted by**

**Xuqi Ouyang**

**In accordance with the requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

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# Certificate of Original Authorship

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I, Xuqi Ouyang, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program

Signature: 欧阳栩棋

Date: 28/02/2020

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# Abstract

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Recent years have seen an increase in the number of English language programs which Chinese universities offer in partnership with overseas universities. Examples of these programs are English for academic purposes (EAP) courses run in China which aim to prepare students for study at English medium universities overseas. The aim of this study is to investigate students' motivation for studying these courses. The setting in which the study is undertaken is an EAP course offered at a university in China in a language centre that has been established and is overseen by an Australian university.

The theoretical bases for this study are Dörnyei's (2009b) L2 Motivational Self System, Ushioda's (2009) person-in-context view of motivation, and Larsen-Freeman and Cameron's (2008) work on complex dynamic systems. The study used a mixed methods approach that entailed the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data; in particular a questionnaire was used, and interviews undertaken with a set of focal students. One hundred and nine students completed the questionnaire. Four students were chosen as focal cases on the basis of their being reflective of the larger study group in terms of gender, program of study, demographic background, and learner archetypes. The data were collected over a period of three months at the university in China. The questionnaire data were examined by looking at responses to questions regarding the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience in relation to gender, academic study program, and demographic origin of the students. The qualitative component of the study aimed to explore the focal students' questionnaire responses in depth.

The quantitative findings showed that the students, overall, had a positive attitude towards their ideal L2 selves, ought-to L2 selves, and L2 learning experiences. A closer look at the responses to the questionnaire items, however, revealed that the students' responses regarding their ideal L2 selves and ought-to L2 selves were varied and multifaceted. Students' ideal L2 selves, ought-to L2 selves, and L2 learning experiences, further, based on correlational analysis were found to be related. The quantitative findings provided the starting point for the qualitative analysis in which the motivations of individual students

were explored in more detail. Based on the analysis of the focal student data, their ideal L2 selves and ought-to L2 selves were found to be changeable, dynamic and responsive to their individual learning environments. In addition, their motivation fluctuated over time. These findings contrast with previous research into the L2 Motivational Self System which has portrayed motivation as being stable and uniform across settings. The findings of this study show the students' motivations to be non-linear in that having a certain ideal L2 self and/or ought-to L2 self did not guarantee that a student would be motivated to learn. The qualitative analysis also showed that the L2 learning experiences were extremely powerful in that, on occasion, they could override students' views of their ideal and ought-to L2 selves. From a practical point of view, the study provides insights into students' motivations for studying English that are beneficial for teachers. Beyond this, however, the theoretical implications of this study are that students' motivations need to be considered from both contextual and complex dynamic perspectives, alongside the L2 Motivational Self System. L2 motivation studies, thus, need to move from a view of the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and L2 motivation as stable and predictive to one that takes into account their sometimes fluctuating and unpredictable nature.