

**LEARNERS' BELIEFS AND INVESTMENT IN THEIR ENGLISH
PRONUNCIATION LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH
MAJOR UNDERGRADUATES IN A CHINA UNIVERSITY**

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**FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITI MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR**

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**THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
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Field of Study: TESL

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ABSTRACT

In China, the examination-oriented education approach, which places greater emphasis on accuracy than fluency, has caused many English language learners to struggle with their English pronunciation. At the tertiary level, although English major university students demonstrate improvement in their overall English proficiency when they enter their universities, many of them are still struggling with their English pronunciation. To respond to this scenario, researchers have identified and analyzed a number of factors that influence English pronunciation learning, such as confidence, learning motivation, anxiety, and attitude. Nevertheless, little attention is given to the role of learners' beliefs and investment as possible factors that influence English pronunciation learning. To fill the gaps, the current study provided a comprehensive understanding of English major students' English pronunciation learning beliefs and investment, as well as the congruence of their beliefs and their investment behaviors in and out of class, to understand the process that happened between them. Employing a multiple-case study, the data collection techniques of this qualitative study included in-depth interviews, observations, diaries, and document analysis. The data were analyzed with the help of NVivo 12. This study found that five English major students hold three different beliefs about their English pronunciation learning goal: native-likeness, intelligibility, and a dilemma between native-likeness and intelligibility. Additionally, the study discovered that beliefs regarding the status of English pronunciation learning also emerged as positive or negative among participants. Moreover, beliefs about English pronunciation

learning strategies included cognitive strategy, social strategy, metacognitive strategy, affective strategy, and memory strategy. Differences and similarities appeared when these professed beliefs were compared to the applied investments. Based on observations both inside and outside of class, it was found that there were two types of investment behaviors: diverse investment and incidental learning. The participants justified their investments based on the personal and contextual factors that mediate their beliefs and investments. Concerning the findings, congruence and in-congruence were identified into three groups: positive congruence, negative congruence, and in-congruence. Further, the thematic and case study findings were discussed in relation to the existing body of knowledge, followed by an illustration of significant conclusions, including some implications, contributions, limitations, and future suggestions.

Keywords: Learners' belief; Learner investment; English pronunciation learning

ABSTRAK

Di negara China, pendekatan pendidikan yang berorientasikan peperiksaan telah meletakkan penekanan yang lebih besar kepada ketepatan sebutan berbanding dengan kefasihan sebutan bagi pelajar Bahasa Inggeris. Ini menyebabkan ramai pelajar bahasa Inggeris bergelut dengan sebutan bahasa Inggeris mereka. Di peringkat pengajian tinggi, walau pun pelajar jurusan bahasa Inggeris menunjukkan peningkatan dalam penguasaan bahasa tersebut, namun secara umumnya, apabila mereka memasuki universiti, mereka tetap mempunyai masalah yang sama dari segi sebutan perkataan bahasa Inggeris. Bagi menangani senario ini, ramai penyelidik telah mengenal pasti dan menganalisis beberapa faktor yang mempengaruhi pembelajaran sebutan bahasa Inggeris, seperti keyakinan, motivasi pembelajaran, kegelisahan dan sikap. Namun begitu, tidak banyak perhatian telah diberikan kepada peranan kepercayaan pembelajaran dan pelaburan pelajar sebagai faktor yang mungkin mempengaruhi pembelajaran sebutan bahasa Inggeris. Untuk mengisi jurang tersebut, kajian semasa ini memberikan pemahaman yang komprehensif tentang kepercayaan pembelajaran dan pelaburan pembelajaran sebutan ke atas lima pelajar jurusan bahasa Inggeris di sebuah universiti di negara China. Tujuannya ialah untuk meneroka kesesuaian kepercayaan mereka dan tingkah laku pelaburan mereka di dalam dan di luar kelas demi untuk memahami proses yang berlaku di antara mereka. Dengan menggunakan kaedah pelbagai kajian kes, teknik pengumpulan data kajian kualitatif ini melibatkan temu bual mendalam, pemerhatian, jurnal, dan analisis dokumen. Data yang terhasil kemudian dianalisis dengan penggunaan aplikasi NVivo 12. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa kelima lima pelajar jurusan bahasa Inggeris ini mempunyai tiga kepercayaan yang berbeza tentang matlamat pembelajaran sebutan bahasa Inggeris, iaitu: keserupaan asli, kebolehfahaman, dan dilema antara keserupaan asli dan kebolehfahaman. Selain daripada itu, didapati juga bahawa kepercayaan mengenai status pembelajaran sebutan bahasa Inggeris juga muncul sebagai positif atau negatif di kalangan mereka. Tambahan lagi, keyakinan tentang strategi pembelajaran sebutan bahasa Inggeris merangkumi strategi kognitif, strategi sosial, strategi metakognitif, strategi afektif dan strategi ingatan. Perbezaan dan persamaan muncul apabila kepercayaan yang diakui ini dibandingkan dengan pelaburan

yang digunakan. Berdasarkan pemerhatian di dalam dan di luar kelas, terdapat dua jenis gelagat pelaburan: pelaburan pelbagai dan pembelajaran sampingan. Para peserta mewajarkan pelaburan mereka berdasarkan faktor peribadi dan kontekstual yang menjadi pengantara kepercayaan dan pelaburan mereka. Analisis data menunjukkan kekongruenan dan ketakkongruenan telah dikenal pasti kepada tiga kumpulan: kekongruenan positif, kekongruenan negatif, dan ketidakkongruenan. Selanjutnya, penemuan tematik dan kajian kes telah dibincangkan berhubung dengan badan pengetahuan sedia ada, diikuti dengan ilustrasi kesimpulan penting, termasuk beberapa implikasi, sumbangan, batasan, dan cadangan masa hadapan.

Kata kunci: Kepercayaan pelajar; Pelaburan pelajar; Pembelajaran sebutan bahasa Inggeris

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	vi
Table of Contents	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	xiv
LIST OF TABLES	xv
LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS	xvi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background	1
1.3 Problem Statement	4
1.4 Research Questions	8
1.5 Conceptual Framework	8
1.6 Research Purposes	15
1.7 The Significance of the Study	16
1.8 Definition of the Terms	18
1.9 Summary	19
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	20
2.1 Introduction	20
2.2 English Pronunciation Learning	20
2.2.1 English Pronunciation Learning Objectives	20
2.2.2 Model Promoting the Intelligibility Principle	24
2.2.3 The Spoken Model of English in China	26
2.2.4 Studies on English Majors' Pronunciation Learning in China	28
2.3 Research into Learners' Beliefs about Language Learning	29
2.3.1 The Definition of Beliefs about Language Learning	29
2.3.2 Approaches to Investigation of Language Learning Beliefs	34
2.3.3 Theoretical Frameworks related to English Learning Beliefs	37
2.3.4 Studies on Learners' Beliefs about English Pronunciation Learning	44
2.4 SLA: language learning motivation and investment	45
2.4.1 Investment in the Form of Language Learning Strategies	54
2.4.2 Norton's investment and identity in language learning	56
2.4.2.1 Identity as multiple and contradictory	56
2.4.2.2 Identity as changing over time and place	58
2.4.2.3 Power, Identity and Resistance	59
2.4.2.4 Imagined communities and imagined identities	65
2.4.3 Language ideology and language learning investment	67
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	70
3.1 Introduction	70
3.2 Rationale for Adopting a Qualitative Study	70
3.3 Setting	73

3.3.1 Research Setting	73
3.3.2 The School of Foreign Language	74
3.4 Selection of Participants	75
3.5 Data Collection	77
3.5.1 Interviews	77
3.5.2 Classroom observations	79
3.5.3 Stimulated recall interview	81
3.5.4 Documents Collection	82
3.5.5 Diary	83
3.6 Data Analysis	85
3.6.1 Organizing the Data	85
3.6.2 Generating Categories, Themes, and Patterns	86
3.6.3 Coding the Data	87
3.7 Data synthesis	88
3.8 Trustworthiness and Transferability	89
3.9 Preliminary data collection	91
3.9.1 Gaining entry to the site	91
3.9.2 Participants	92
3.9.3 Data collection	92
3.9.4 Proposed change	93
3.10 Data collection of Main Study	95
3.11 Summary	95
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	96
4.1 Introduction	96
4.2 The Within-Case Analysis	97
4.2.1 Case Chen	97
4.2.2 Chen's Belief	98
4.2.2.1 English Pronunciation Learning Goal Belief	98
4.2.2.2 English Pronunciation Learning Importance Belief	101
4.2.2.3 English Pronunciation Learning Strategy Belief	108
Cognitive strategy	108
4.2.3 Chen's Investment	114
4.2.3.1 Diverse Investment	115
4.2.3.1.1 A strategic active learner of English pronunciation in the classroom	115
4.2.3.1.2 An autonomous English pronunciation learner out of classroom	121
4.2.3.2 Key challenge	123
4.2.3.2.1 Perceived difficulties in establishing social relationships with exchange students on campus	123
4.2.3.2.2 Unfair power relations affected investment in the English pronunciation learning	124
4.2.4 Congruent between belief and investment in English pronunciation learning	125
4.2.5 Case Lan	126
4.2.6 Lan's Belief	128
4.2.6.1 The English pronunciation learning goal belief	128
4.2.6.2 The English pronunciation learning importance belief	131

4.2.6.3 English Pronunciation Learning Strategy Belief.....	135
4.2.7 Lan's Investment	141
4.2.7.1 Incidental English Pronunciation Learning	141
4.2.7.1.1 An occasional learner of English pronunciation in the classroom	142
4.2.7.1.2 An examination- machine outside of the classroom	144
4.2.7.2 Key Challenge	146
4.2.7.2.1 A poor learner in English phonetic knowledge	147
4.2.7.2.2 Perceived difficulties in establishing social relationships with advanced English speakers on campus	148
4.2.8 Congruent between belief and investment in English pronunciation learning	149
4.2.9 Case Ping	150
4.2.10 Ping's belief.....	153
4.2.10.1 The English Pronunciation Learning Goal Belief	153
4.2.10.2 The English pronunciation Learning importance belief.....	155
4.2.10.3 The English Pronunciation Learning Strategy Belief.....	158
4.2.11 Ping's Investment.....	163
4.2.11.1 Diverse investment	163
4.2.11.1.1 A dedicated learner in the English translation classroom	164
4.2.11.1.2 An autonomous segmental learner out of classroom	166
4.2.11.2 Key challenge	169
4.2.11.2.1 A poor learner in English suprasegmental phonetic knowledge	169
4.2.11.2.2 Written- examination-oriented culture	170
4.2.11.2.3 Perceived difficulties in establishing social relationships with exchange students on campus	171
4.2.12 Incongruent between belief and investment in English pronunciation learning	173
4.2.13 Case Ma	174
4.2.14 Ma's belief.....	176
4.2.14.1 The English Pronunciation Learning Goal Belief	176
4.2.14.2 The English pronunciation Learning importance belief.....	178
4.2.14.3 The English Pronunciation Learning Strategy Belief.....	183
4.2.15 Ma's investment	185
4.2.15.1 Incidental Pronunciation Learning	186
4.2.15.1.1 A passive English pronunciation learner in the classroom	186
4.2.15.1.2 An examination machine outside of classroom	188
4.2.15.2 Key Challenge	190
4.2.15.2.1 A poor learner in English pronunciation learning	190
4.2.15.2.2 Academic pressure.....	192
4.2.16 Congruent between English pronunciation learning belief and investment	192
4.2.17 Case Xi	193
4.2.18 Xi's belief.....	196
4.2.18.1 English Pronunciation Learning Goal Belief	196
4.2.18.2 The Importance of English Pronunciation Learning Belief	200
4.2.18.3 The belief of English pronunciation learning strategy	204
4.2.19 Xi's Investment	207
4.2.19.1 Incidental Pronunciation Learning	208

4.2.19.1.1 An occasional learner of English pronunciation in the classroom ...	208
4.1.19.1.2 An examination machine out of the classroom	209
4.2.19.2 Key Challenge	212
4.2.19.2.1 A poor learner in English pronunciation learning	212
4.2.19.2.2 Written examination culture	214
4.2.19.2.3 Unfair power relations affect investment in the English pronunciation	214
4.2.19.2.4 Lack of English pronunciation-related courses	215
4.2.20 In-congruent between English pronunciation learning belief and investment	216
4.3 The Cross-Case Analysis	217
4.3.1 The English Pronunciation Learning Goal Belief	218
4.3.1.1 Native English Speaking (NES) versus English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)	219
4.3.1.2 Dilemma between native-likeness and intelligibility	220
4.3.2 The Importance of English Pronunciation Learning Belief	221
4.3.3 The English Pronunciation Learning Strategy Belief	222
4.3.4 The Investment in English Pronunciation Learning	223
4.3.4.1 Imagined community and identities influence learners' investment in English pronunciation learning	224
4.3.4.2 Material and symbolic resources influence learners' investment in English pronunciation learning	225
4.3.4.3 Identity construction influences learners' investment in English pronunciation learning	226
4.3.4.4 Contextual factors influence learners' English pronunciation investment	228
4.3.5 Congruence between the Beliefs of English Pronunciation Learning and Investment Behavior	229
CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	230
5.1 Summaries of the Problem, Methodology, and the Key Findings of the Study	230
5.2 Key Findings and Discussion	237
5.2.1 Diverse English Pronunciation Learning Goal Beliefs	238
5.2.2 Intermediate and high-level proficiency participants held positive English pronunciation learning beliefs, while low-level proficiency participants had opposing ideas	243
5.2.3 The pronunciation learning strategy beliefs of high-level proficiency participants are more diverse and effective than those of intermediate and low-level proficiency participants	245
5.2.4 Diverse investment versus Incidental learning	248
5.2.4.1 Imagined community and identity influence investment in English pronunciation learning	248
5.2.4.2 Social/cultural capital influence learners' strategic investment in English pronunciation.	250
5.2.4.3 Learners' different identity constructions result in distinct investments in English pronunciation in and out of classroom	251
5.2.4.4 Contextual factors influence learners' agency power in English Pronunciation learning investment	252
5.2.5 The Complex Relationship between learners' English pronunciation learning beliefs and investment.	256

5.2.5.1 Positive Congruence Cases	257
5.2.5.2 Negative congruence cases	259
5.2.5.3 In-congruent cases	260
5.3 Theoretical Implication	260
5.3.1 Filling research gaps within the Chinese context	261
5.3.2 Relationship between imagined identity and learner's pronunciation learning belief	262
5.3.3 Providing lists of contextual constraints and facilitating factors regarding fostering English pronunciation learning investment	262
5.3.4 The Good English pronunciation Learner	263
5.3.5 Relationship between learners' English pronunciation beliefs and investment in English pronunciation learning	265
5.4 Practical Implication	268
5.4.1 Implication for English Examination Policy	268
5.4.2 Implication for English textbook designer	268
5.4.3 Implication for School	269
5.4.4 Implication for English teacher	270
5.4.5 Implication for English teacher education	272
5.5 Recommendations for Future Studies	273
REFERENCES	274
APPENDIX	317
APPENDIX A1 Individual Background Questionnaire (IBQ)	317
APPENDIX B Interview Protocol	318
APPENDIX C Classroom Observation Guide	322
APPENDIX D Instructions For Stimulated Recall	324
APPENDIX E Stimulated recall interviews (English pronunciation class)	325
APPENDIX F Guidelines Diary Entries	326
Appendix G Letter of Permission for Data Collection	327
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	328

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 Darwin and Norton's 2015 model of investment.....	16
Figure 1.2 Conceptual Framework of the study.....	19
Figure 5.1 Proposed Model of the Relationships between Learner Beliefs and investment in terms of English pronunciation learning in China.....	272

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Key definitions for learner beliefs about language learning.....	28
Table 3.1 Summary of Data Collection.....	90
Table 3.2 Summary of background information about the participants.....	101
Table 4.1 Summary of Comparison of Themes and Sub-themes Across Cases.....	223
Table 5.1: English major students' English pronunciation learning belief.....	238
Table 5.2: Learner Pronunciation Investment in and out of the Classroom.....	240
Table 5.3: Learners' stated beliefs and observed investment in and out of the classroom.....	241

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

MoE	:	Ministry of Education
EFL	:	English as Foreign Language
ESL	:	English as Second Language
NS	:	Native Speaker
SLA	:	Second Language Acquisition
LLB	:	Language Learning Belief
BALLI	:	Language Learning Belief Inventory
SCT	:	Vygotsky's sociocultural theory
TRA	:	Reasoned Action Theory
BI	:	Behavioral Intention
SN	:	Subjective Norm
TESOL	:	Teaching English for Speakers of Other Language
LFC	:	Lingua Franca Core

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, conceptual framework, purpose, objective, significance of the study, limitations of the study, the definitions used in the study and summary.

1.2 Background

With the implementation of China's reform and opening-up policy in the past three decades, China has undergone great changes and earned fruitful achievements in many areas ever since. One of its notable achievements is the prosperity of foreign affairs that has benefited all aspects of social development in China. Foreign language education, especially English learning, contributes more and more to the country's future development. To meet the needs of China's rapid social and economic development over the past three decades and the increasing demand for English-speaking intellectuals, the education of English as a foreign language has received more and more attention from the academic field.

As the demand for Chinese students' English proficiency is getting better, the requirements for basic English skills are getting stricter for English majors. In 2000, the Chinese Ministry of Education (CMoE) promulgated the English Teaching Syllabus for English Majors in Colleges and Universities (hereafter refer to the syllabus 2000),

which puts forward different requirements for pronunciation teaching and learning in each semester among four academic years. In the first semester, first-year students are able to apply spelling rules and phonetic transcription to read new words proficiently and read the materials correctly as difficult as English texts in the 12th grade. In the second semester, there are two requirements for English major students. Firstly, they can consciously imitate sounds, correct their mispronunciation, grasp of multi syllabic words, compound words, stress patterns in the sentences, the rhythm of reading and speaking and pay attention to the influence of shift of stress on the expression of meaning. Secondly, they can master the basic rules of phonetic changes in speech flow, consonant plosives, and assimilation skills. Thirdly, they can grasp the intonations in declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences. In the fourth semester, there are also several goals for English major students. Firstly, they can pronounce correctly. Secondly, they can grasp the rhythm of reading and speaking well. Thirdly, they can master the basic rules of phonetic change in speech flow, linking, consonant plosives, and assimilation skills. Fourthly, they can grasp the intonation in declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences. Fifthly, they can master the relationship between stressed or unstressed pronunciation and the transmission of new and old information. In the sixth semester, English major students can pronounce correctly. That is to say, their intonation is relatively natural, and their speech flow is relatively smooth. In the eighth semester, English major students can correctly pronounce with natural intonation and smooth speech flow. Moreover, this syllabus(2000) also requires the English major students to identify the speaker's tones and attitudes, distinguish various English variants (American English, British English, Australian English) in the listening

part, and communicate with natural intonation in the speaking part. However, the fact is that only a small number of English majors can meet this requirement(Liu & Zhang, 2022; Xu,2022; Yang, 2023).

The English pronunciation course is open for the English major students in the first year first semester in the university. Even though the syllabus (2000) requires 32 hours to teach and learn pronunciation, the English phonetic course of the majority of universities and colleges failed to meet syllabus requirements and is ignored in the relevant classes by teachers and learners in the following learning years (Wang, 2007). Thus, most Chinese English major students have many problems with their pronunciation and are unable to meet the final requirement of the syllabus (2000) (Lan, 2010; Ma, 2016; Duan & Cao, 2017; Zhang, 2019; Sun & Xu, 2019; Pang &Gao, 2020; Song, 2019; Xu, 2020; Liu & Zhang, 2022; Xu,2022; Yang, 2023). Generally speaking, the problems can be divided into three aspects: confusion about Chinese and English approximate sounds, confusion about approximate English sounds; adding extra phonemes to the pronunciation; inaccurate in suprasegmental elements such as words and sentences stress, liaison, elision, assimilation, intrusion, weak forms, intonation, and rhythm (Lv, 2012).

The past and present studies have provided many insights into the poor English learning situation of English majors based on individual differences (Cen, 2023; Dang & Cui, 2013; Wang, 2007; Bian, 2020; Ge & Xu, 2021). However, there seems to be a lack of research to observe learners' beliefs and investment, which attracted the current study.

Wei (2006) pointed out that pronunciation should be a central concern if anyone wants to acquire communicative skills. Wong (1993) also argued that when pronunciation and listening are linked, the importance of pronunciation is more prominent and noticeable. In other words, listeners expect speakers to adopt a certain rhythm and intonation pattern to guarantee effective communication takes place. Otherwise, the listeners may not get the intended meaning when the rhythm and intonation are lower than expected. It is evident that intelligible pronunciation is a crucial component of communicative competence (Morley, 1991). Therefore, it is significant to understand English pronunciation learning for English majors from belief and investment that have not been noticed in the past.

1.3 Problem Statement

In China, the English Syllabus for English Majors in Colleges and Universities (2000) requires the students to grasp the English pronunciation to cultivate students' practical ability to communicate. However, most of English major students' English pronunciation is not up to the demands of the syllabus when they graduate (He & Ding, 2004; Yang, 2005; Lan, 2010; Ma, 2016) while a few students are good enough to pursue the same pronunciation as the native speakers (Duan & Cao, 2017). As English pronunciation plays an essential role in successful communication, the individual difference factors influencing English pronunciation of English major students has been given attention by researchers, such as interference of learners' mother language (Cen, 2023), prior bad pronunciation instruction experience (Dang & Cui, 2013), confidence (Fu, 2007), learning motivation, anxiety, and attitude (Wang, 2007; Bian, 2020; Ge &

Xu, 2021), age and gender (Yang & Yang, 2007), as well as self-concept (Zhang, 2009). However, very few empirical studies have attempted to explore learners' beliefs and investment concerning pronunciation learning in China, considering the importance of this field as illustrated in the background to the present study. It is confirmed with existing studies that have focused on learners' beliefs about language learning in general, but studies focusing on a particular aspect of language learning such as pronunciation are rarer (Simon & Taverniers, 2011). Even though the researcher came across with the some studies (e.g., Benzies, 2013; Pawlak, 2015) which had addressed the English pronunciation learning belief but they were in different EFL contexts rather than in China.

Research on learner beliefs is made on the assumption that learners "perspectives and thoughts guide their learning behaviors (e.g. Horwitz, 1987, 1988; Wenden 1987; Barcelos 2003) and determine the ultimate success of their learning (e.g. Ellis, 2004, 2008). As far as the current study is concerned, to improve English major students' English pronunciation proficiency, the most important thing is to listen to learners' voices about English pronunciation learning. Such beliefs, according to Macalister and Nation (2020), are significant for curriculum designers since student wants (what and how learners would like to learn), necessities (what learners need to know to be successful in language use), and lacks (what learners were not taught or did not practice in their previous learning) are all important. As Macalister and Nation (2020) argue, these three aspects are very important in order to meet students' learning needs when designing a language curriculum. Based on the data from Ministry of Education

of China in 2021, there are over 1 million English major students who will take up a teacher-related job are currently studying English at tertiary institutions nationwide. Therefore, it is necessary to look into their belief about English pronunciation learning in Chinese tertiary education.

The concept of "investment" has attracted the attention of second language acquisition scholars and led to several relevant studies. Some studies refer to "investment" in the target language (McKay & Wong 1996; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Potowski, 2004), learners' language investment in the dual immersion classroom (Babino & Stewart, 2017; Ballinger, 2017), multilingual investment of language learners (Bea, 2013; Babino & Stewart, 2019). Other studies involve "investment" in specific language skills such as writing (McKay & Wong, 1996; Harklau, 2000; Maguire & Graves, 2001), in particular aspects of language such as discourse (McKay & Wong 1996; Angelil-Carter, 1997; Hunter, 1997), and language learning projects such as adult ESL training projects (Skilton-Sylvester, 2002). It is clear that most of them focus on the investment in English as a whole, and more attention is needed for more specific languages in the framework of EFL, such as English pronunciation learning.

English pronunciation learning is not only a cognitive process but also a social-cultural process. The previous studies have tried to analyze the unideal English pronunciation learning that results from learners' learning motivation (Wang, 2013; Lu, 2016; Liu, 2013). From the perspective of motivation, all language learners are regarded as unchanged and fixed personalities. This cognitive perspective ignores the sociocultural

nature of English pronunciation learning in certain learning conditions. Pronunciation learning is most closely tied to learner identity (Guiora et al.,1972; Müller, 2011). Investment in English pronunciation learning thereby entails investing in the construction of identity. Norton's investment model (2015) is the ideal lens for understanding how students negotiate power relations in different learning settings and to what extent those conditions shape the way students learn English pronunciation.

Learner beliefs are regarded as learners' perspectives that are embedded in and dynamically mediated by the sociocultural, interactional, and experiential context, which are potentially influential in shaping and influencing learners' investment in accomplishing their learning tasks (Norton,1995; Muller, 2011). However, little is known about how learner beliefs influence and are influenced by learners' investment, particularly regarding English pronunciation learning. To explore the degree of discrepancies or consistencies between learner' English pronunciation learning beliefs about their investment help understand the learners' English pronunciation learning process and may shed light on potential reasons behind the oft-reported variation in learners' English pronunciation learning proficiency (He &Ding, 2004; Yang, 2005; Lan, 2010; Ma, 2016). Such an understanding could inform the design of educational interventions that intend to boost learners' English pronunciation learning.

In conclusion, by examining the beliefs and investment of pronunciation learning, this study could raise learners' awareness on the importance of pronunciation learning to achieve intelligibility in communicating in the target language. Besides, the findings

from the present study will supply English teacher with information to help students to make informed choices with regards to English pronunciation learning in China. Lastly, it can provide helpful information for policymaker to develop an updated English pronunciation learning course and construct a supportive English pronunciation learning environment.

1.4 Research Questions

This study attempts to fill the gaps, aiming to address three research questions:

1. What are the beliefs of English major students in China regarding their English pronunciation learning?
2. How do English major students in China invest in their English pronunciation learning?
3. How are English major students' pronunciation learning beliefs congruent with their investment in learning English pronunciation?

1.5 Conceptual Framework

Language learner's belief is learner's perspective on anything related to language learning such as teachers, exams, class activities. It is embedded in and dynamically mediated by the sociocultural, interactive, and experiential context (Barcelos, 2003; Eckman & Ryan, 2015; Mercer, 2011). Learner's language learning beliefs have both cognitive and social nature as they are based on learners' identity, personality, previous learning experiences (van Dijk, 1998; Pajares, 1992; Barcelos, 2003) and social

interaction such as interactions with others (parents, friends, teachers, etc.) as well as the tools (media, textbooks, classroom activities, etc.) provided with/ within those social environments (Barcelos, 2003; Kalaja, 1995; Gabillion, 2005). To be specific, the learner's previous and present learning experiences include the formal and informal learning experiences (Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Barcelos, 2003). The former refers to the schooling days and the latter refers to the experiences the learners obtain from cram schools where learners attend after regular schools, overseas experiences of travel and study (Suzuki, 2014). These early experiences are essential to shaping learners' way of perceiving a learning task, a whole course of study (Ramsden, 1992), and their confidence in their ability to learn English (Allen, 1996). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the learner's belief construction from the learners' learning experiences, social interaction, personality as well as identity.

In terms of studying English pronunciation learning beliefs components, the current study will be guided by English major students' beliefs about English pronunciation goal (Simon, 2005; Tergujeff, 2013), English pronunciation learning importance, (Cenoz & Garcia-Lecumberri, 1999), and English pronunciation strategies (Simon & Taverniers, 2011). These three components are described in detail.

The first component is beliefs about English pronunciation learning goals. Learners may have different language learning goals. Some students must aim to pass all kinds of exams, while others may pursue native-like pronunciation. If learners have different learning goals before they start learning, their learning approach will differ according to

the specific learning goals (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). English pronunciation learning objectives have two directions, namely, the “principle of nativeness” and the “principle of intelligibility” (Levis, 2005). The former one refers to sounds like an General American English or British Received Pronunciation, and the latter one, on the other side, is described as the degree to which utterances are understood by the listener (Munro & Derwing, 1995). In China, even though Received Pronunciation and General American are still standard models to follow in teaching and learning, the learners can still receive different English varieties through media (Huang, 2020). Hence, it is significant to get to understand the current Chinese English major students’ English pronunciation learning goals.

The second component refers to learners have their ideas about the importance of English pronunciation learning compared to other English learning skills, such as speaking, listening, writing. A belief that learning English pronunciation is the most important part of language learning will almost certainly lead students to invest the majority of their time into new English pronunciation rules at the expense of other language learning tasks (Horwitz, 1988). However, if they feel that voice is not important, that is a different story. Thus, it is necessary to explore the Chinese English major students’ English pronunciation learning importance belief.

The third component is the beliefs about the English pronunciation learning strategies. Learning strategies may be directly related to learners’ actual language learning practices and different learners’ have different beliefs about learning strategies to help

their learning (Horwitz, 1987). That is to say, learners themselves know how best to learn a second or foreign language (Yang, 1999). Therefore, it is necessary to know different learners' belief about comprehensive English pronunciation learning strategies to learn their English pronunciation.

In summary, identifying these beliefs and reflecting on their potential impact on language learning can give implications for future syllabus design and teachers' practice in the curriculum (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005) and help clarify learner behaviors and attitudes (Benson & Lor, 1999).

On the other hand, language learning is not only a process of psychology but also a sociocultural process. Norton (1995) put forward the concept of language investment as a supplement to the psychological structure of motivation, which fails to explain various problems in second language acquisition. The construct of investment mainly draws on the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1991), and it plays a vital role in language learning theory for explaining the socially and historically constructed relationship between language learners' identities and their language learning commitment (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Structurally, the investment (Figure 1.1) is hinged on three intersecting dimensions, namely identity, ideology and capital and revitalizes the promise of change that post-structuralist theories seek to achieve, aiming to reveal that the asymmetric distribution of power no longer depends on the simple dichotomy of native speakers and language learners (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 41).

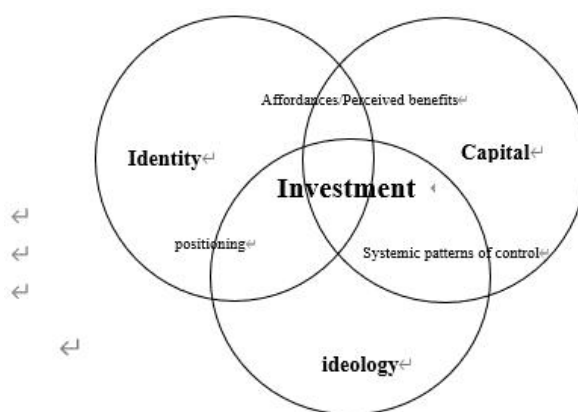


Figure 1.1 Darwin and Norton's 2015 Model of Investment

The first construct of investment is identity. Norton (2000) defines identity as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how this relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p5). Identity should be understood as a series of individual and personal characters that each individual possesses and as fluid, context-related, and context-producing, especially in historical and cultural circumstances (Norton, 2011). It involves how the self relates to the world and to other human beings (Lamb, 2011). An essential element of identity formation is "agency," which enables us to perceive individuals as intentional beings. Van Lier (2010) points out that such agency includes initiative, intentionality, control, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. In the context of English as a foreign language, the EFL learning community may influence the construction of learner identity. Learners who establish a positive identity are more likely to put more effort into EFL learning. While, learners who establish a negative identity are likely to put less effort into EFL learning (Teng, 2019). That is to say, how EFL English learners perceive their identity is a primary determinant of their willingness to strive to master "the rules, norms, genres and multimodal features specific to different communicative

contexts" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 48).

The second construct of the investment model is language ideology, which is regarded as a social practice. The value of language, the establishment of language policy, and the construction of ethnolinguistic identities are all determined by language ideology. Darvin and Norton define ideologies as “dominant ways of thinking that organize and stabilize societies while simultaneously determining modes of inclusion and exclusion” (Darvin & Norton 2015: 72). Thus, learners are positioned and position themselves in many ways even before they speak (e.g., as a native, bilingual, or monolingual speaker) so that they navigate through spaces where they are not only granted or denied the right to speak but also the right to enter (Darvin & Norton 2015). It is believed that by studying how ideologies work, we can dissect not only the power dynamics of communicative events but also the power structures that can forbid access to the specific spaces in which these events occur. This diversified formulation complements the view that identities are diverse and mobile, and that capital changes the value in different environments. At the same time, it is more in line with the new social order of mobility and liquidity but also allows for an investment concept that generates agency and resistance.

The third notion of investment is about capital. Learners investing in learning an L2 understand that it can allow them to acquire a wider range of symbolic resources (e.g. education, prestige, social networks) and material resources (e.g. money, real estate). These resources comprise learners’ social and economic capital which will in turn

increase the value of their cultural capital such as knowledge, credentials and modes of thought (Norton, 2013). In Bourdieu's view, a person's capital value is not fixed but changes with the passage of time and space. Therefore, with the change of people's capital value, their sense of themselves and the opportunity to reassess their desires for future are also changing. Capital also represents power (Bourdieu, 1986). The issue of powers relationship also occurs among EFL learners as they already have various capitals such as material resources, linguistic skills, knowledge, and social networks before going to specific learning communities. Thus, based on their different capitals they can largely determine the position of each learner, the power hierarchy in a certain learning community and the right to actively participate and speak. In other words, learners with more capital can easily participate and speak in learning, which can be transformed into power. In comparison, learners with less capital tend to participate and talk less, indicating that they lack power in specific learning communities (Park, 2019).

Based on the sociological construct of investment proposed by Norton (1995), learners invest in second language learning because they believe that they will receive returns in the form of symbolic and material resources. Müller (2011) also said that learners' beliefs about language, culture, and learning could be relevant with their investment in obtaining access to L2-mediated communities and making use of chances when they study abroad. It is a general and reasonable assumption that beliefs may influence learners' decisions in the actual investment, and the investment may have a similar effect on the beliefs. However, there is no empirical studies comparing learners' belief

with their investment nor exploring the role of contextual and sociocultural influences on the nature of belief–investment relationships. Moreover, beliefs about pronunciation also appear to be related to learners’ identity constructions, in that the portrayal of desired identity aspects seems to influence their readiness to work on their pronunciation (Müller, 2011). It is reasonable to predict the relationship between English pronunciation learning belief and English pronunciation learning investment is not just simple causal mapping from cognition to action. Therefore, it is significant to explore the congruence between learners’ belief and their investment in terms of English pronunciation learning.

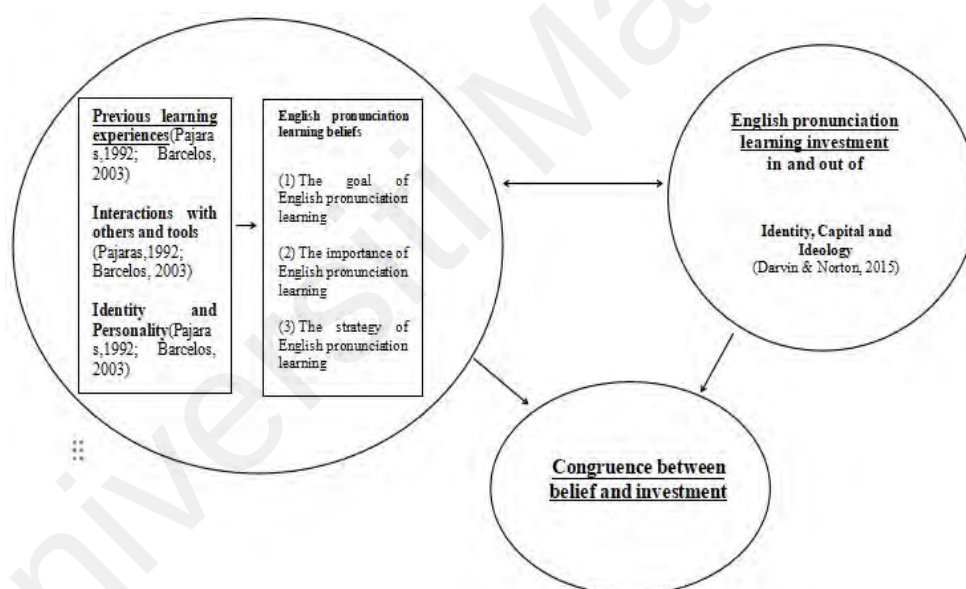


Figure 1.2 Conceptual Framework of the Study

1.6 Research Purposes

As the demand for Chinese students' English proficiency is getting better, the requirements for basic English skills are getting stricter for English majors. In 2000, the Chinese Ministry of Education (CMoE) promulgated the English Teaching Syllabus for

English Majors in Colleges and Universities (hereafter refer to the syllabus 2000), which puts forward different requirements for pronunciation teaching and learning in each semester among four academic years. However, except for a few students who can achieve satisfactory English pronunciation proficiency, most Chinese English major students have many problems with their pronunciation and are unable to meet the requirement of the syllabus (2000) (Lan, 2010; Ma, 2016; Duan & Cao, 2017; Zhang, 2019; Sun & Xu, 2019; Pang & Gao, 2020; Song, 2019; Xu, 2020; Liu & Zhang, 2022; Xu, 2022; Yang, 2023). Some studies have tried to analyze their differences in English pronunciation proficiency from individual differences like interference of learners' mother language (Cen, 2023), confidence (Fu, 2007), learning motivation, anxiety, and attitude (Bian, 2020; Ge & Xu, 2021), age and gender (Yang & Yang, 2007) as well as self-concept (Zhang, 2009). Few empirical studies have attempted to explore learners' beliefs and investment concerning pronunciation learning in China. The purpose of this study is thus to understand the factors that shape the difference in English pronunciation learning proficiency of Chinese English major students from their English learning belief and investment.

1.7 The Significance of the Study

Theoretically, it contributes towards the theoretical explanation of learners' beliefs and investment in English pronunciation learning and the nature of relationships between learner beliefs and learning investment in the Chinese context where English is learned as a foreign language. It is also anticipated that the study will contribute to the ongoing

effort to develop a theory of individual differences and the role they play in language learning. The specific practical significance is as follows.

Firstly, this study can be fruitful in enabling other learners to reflect on and examine their own English pronunciation learning beliefs about their investment. At the same time, understanding the sources of the kind of discrepancies between learners' belief and their actual learning investment can make the learners aware of the importance of their belief and may prompt them to have interest in English pronunciation learning. Furthermore, learners may come to this understanding that not all the things they think to be true about their teaching can be transferrable to their learning investment. Examining and ascribing this mismatch to sociocultural perspectives may alert the learner about the importance of contextual factors shaping their belief and hindering or stimulating their learning investment.

Moreover, this study will provide in-depth information about Chinese learners' beliefs and their learning investment. This will assist English teachers and managers to make better sense of what Chinese English major students bring into the learning context and their investment to language learning. This knowledge can help teachers in three ways, (1) by detecting if there is a mismatch between their own belief system and their learners'. As learner beliefs influence the actions learners perform to learn an L2, a mismatch between the learner and teacher belief systems is likely to result in little learning taking place; (2) by helping them to make sound pedagogical decisions, especially where teachers feel it desirable to try to challenge those learner beliefs and

learning behaviors which are deemed to constitute a potential barrier to successful language learning, and (3) by developing appropriate curricula and teaching materials and adopting effective methods of teaching for a particular group of learners.

Finally, this study may also give implications for policy-makers by understanding English major students' various English pronunciation learning needs to adjust the traditional pronunciation teaching and learning paradigm to adapt the trends of times.

1.8 Definition of the Terms

Learner's belief: Learner belief is defined as student's conceptions, ideas, and opinions, perspectives about language learning that are socially and discursively constructed by the learners and influence learners' learning behaviors (Kalaja et al., 2018). In the current study, learner belief refers to their belief about English pronunciation learning difficulties, English pronunciation learning importance (Cenoz & Garcia-Lecumberri, 1999), English pronunciation goal (Simon, 2005; Tergujeff, 2013) and English pronunciation strategies (Simon & Taverniers, 2011). It is formed from their identity, personality and previous learning experiences as well as social interactions (Barcelos, 2000), all of which are shaped by their social interactions and prior educational experiences (Barcelos, 2000).

Investment: Investment is a notion that stresses the efforts learners put into learning with the expectation of acquiring tangible and intangible returns which will "increase

the value of their cultural capital” (Norton, 1995, p.17). Both Norton and Toohey (2011) believe that unlike motivation which is generally regarded as a fixed psychological construct, investment should be considered a social construct that is subjected to the embedded social environment. In other words, the idea of investment should be understood in the context of the social practice, where language learners, as social beings, interact with other social actors and make contextualized investments that will benefit them either symbolically or materially.

EFL: EFL (English as a Foreign Language) is a term used to describe the development of English language competency in a country where English is not the native or dominant language or a country that was never colonized by an English-speaking nation.

English major students: University students who are majoring in English.

1.9 Summary

This introductory chapter has introduced the background of the study, the problems statements, the research questions, the theoretical and conceptual framework, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the limitations of the research, and the key terms used in the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section is to introduce relevant issues such as the objective of learning English pronunciation, the model used in instructions and empirical studies on English majors' English pronunciation learning in China. The second section is a review of previous studies on language learners' beliefs in terms of definition, research approaches, relevant theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies. The third section deals with the differences between motivation and investment, the definition of investment in terms of language acquisition, and empirical studies about English learning investment.

2.2 English Pronunciation Learning

2.2.1 English Pronunciation Learning Objectives

The definition of learning objectives is closely related to learners' belief about pronunciation learning. These learning objectives may be influenced by two different orientations that are "principle of native-likeness" and the "principle of intelligibility" (Levis, 2005). In the following, I will discuss the potential of these two orientations to support the learning process. In response to different waves of interest and views on pronunciation, research and pedagogy have been affected by the discussion and pursuit of two different orientations, namely the "principle of native-likeness" and the

"principle of intelligibility" (Levis, 2005). Although teachers and scholars are mostly skeptical about the validity of the native-speaker construction (Jenkins, 2007), some areas of foreign language curriculum and teaching practice seem to be influenced by this model. One such area is pronunciation training, in which native-speaker orientation still appears to be ubiquitous in classroom practice, in textbooks, and perhaps in the minds of students. Therefore, to investigate learners' beliefs on pronunciation, one must consider their learning goals and the influence of potential native language tendencies on their learning process.

The principle of native-likeness assumes that native-like pronunciation is the ideal and achievable goal of English as second language instruction. Therefore "the native speaker" is undoubtedly the ideal for teachers and learners to imitate. This orientation is mainly based on hierarchy. That is to say, native speakers have more privileges than non-native speakers, which means that non-native speakers should learn standard grammar, vocabulary, and idioms from native speakers. In turn, native speakers should provide criteria to measure the performance of non-native speakers (Kramsch, 1998a). Learners should work hard to eliminate their foreign accents and follow an idealized norm that may be too difficult to imitate, not just in terms of pronunciation. Even the most successful second language learners may not find outside recognition of their efforts because the authority of native speakers is legitimized by birth, education, and membership in certain social groups (Kramsch, 1998a). This inevitable disadvantage may eventually demoralize the learner who likes "ducks that can't be swan" (Cook, 1999, p. 187).

Thus, studies have clearly questioned the static, homogenous, depoliticized, and non-contextual principle (Doerr & Kumagai, 2009) that accents are inherently regarded as a bad thing and put in the place of treatment, intervention, and eradication in the same way as a language pathology (Munro & Derwing, 1999). Actually, it turns out that only a small proportion of learners are truly motivated and can finally achieve native-like pronunciation (Moyer, 1999). This indicates that native-speaker competence as the ultimate goal of English as second language learning is neither realizable nor desirable, but unrealistic and identity-threatening for most speakers, especially in terms of pronunciation. However, Levis (2005) contends that this model still affects pronunciation training in the class and the development of teaching materials. For example, scholars (Wang & Fang, 2020; Pan et al., 2021; Huang, 2020; Timmis, 2002) found that most of EFL, ESL, and EIL learners would like to speak English as a native speakers' accents.

The principle of intelligibility is an alternative to the principle of native-likeness. It takes mutual understanding as the overall goal of pronunciation training, which means that different characteristics of the foreign accent have different degrees of influence on intelligibility. In this context, the concept "intelligibility" is described as the degree to which utterances are understood by the listener (Munro & Derwing, 1995). However, it is worth noting that intelligibility is not automatically correlated with the degree of accentedness of speech. As Munro and Derwing (1995) showed, even if the listener can perceive the obvious accents in the learner's speech, only some accents are hard to

understand. Munro (2008) concludes that millions of second language users around the world successfully use foreign-accented speech to communicate, suggesting that accent-free pronunciation is not a necessary goal for second language learners or teachers.

Therefore, the concept of intelligibility is based on the communicative needs of learners, and it broadens the scope and understanding of pronunciation training. The principle of native-likeness bears the traces of the Audiolingual Approach and encourages teachers to focus on isolated segments and drill practice, while the principle of intelligibility invites teachers to train segments and supra-segments in a more meaningful contexts as well as in connection with other skills and language aspects. Moreover, tolerance for an intelligible accent is in support of the learners' potential desire to express their identity through their own speech. Thus, a focus on intelligibility can consider learners' individual needs and learning goals, which may support their participation in L2-mediated interactions.

Although intelligibility is clearly useful as a guiding principle in pronunciation teaching and learning, it is still a challenge to translate intelligibility principle into concrete learning objectives. Levis (2005) assumes on a very general level, according to intelligibility principle, the instruction thus should focus on those features that are most helpful for understanding rather than those that are relatively unhelpful. There have been many discussions about the definition and classification of this kind of beneficial and unhelpful elements, but the results seem to be ambiguous and partially problematic. One of the challenges is that intelligibility is complex and interwoven with different

perspectives, personalities, and experiences (Macdonald, 2002), highlighting the individual pronunciation needs and goals. Therefore, it is still complex to set up a set of predefined learning goals on the level of segmental and suprasegmental. Therefore, the goal can only be pursued according to their respective teaching backgrounds. Another major challenge is that it is difficult to define learning objectives without drawing on the native speaker versus non-native speaker dichotomy. Scholars in the EFL/ESL/EIL field have developed some models that try to specify learning goals based on the principle of intelligibility. For example, the Lingua Franca Core focuses on the discussion about which pronunciation elements are notably important for learners to acquire.

2.2.2 Model Promoting the Intelligibility Principle

Jenkins (2000) developed the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) model as a response to the spread of English internationally and the growing group of non-native speakers. Her intention is to find a way to promote mutual intelligibility in communication where English is as a lingua franca, to encourage people to accept pronunciation features that are regularly, and systematically pronounced “incorrectly”, and not to impede the intelligibility for non-native listeners. Based on an empirical study in the contexts where non-native speakers use English as a Lingua Franca, LFC classifies the different segmental features and suprasegmental features into core and non-core categories. Therefore, Jenkins believes that learners now can decide whether they want to learn English for the purpose of communicating with other non-native speakers, grasping only the core features relevant to them, or whether they want to use English in the

context of native speakers, requiring both receptive ability and productive ability to pronounce the core features and non-core features intelligibly. Jenkins (2007) aims to put non-native accents and regional native accents on the same level and to resolve the conflict of intelligibility-identity by enabling non-native speakers to express their L1 identity and membership of the international ELF community, at the same time they maintain intelligible to their ELF interlocutors and still able to understand the accents of English as Native Language (ENL).

Although the concept of LFC has received enough attention among researchers, Jenkins (2007) admits that the responses are quite polarized. Even though some attempts have been made to transfer the model to various teaching contexts (Walker, 2001), other scholars have criticized the model for legitimizing non-native English accents and for the general nature of the core and non-core classifications for use in the context where English as a lingua franca. In my research background, I value and keep my work away from Jenkins' advice. I agree that there is a need to develop an alternative learning goal that allows learners to maintain an intelligible degree of accentedness in their speech, allowing for less identity-threatening, and more realistic and individualized learning goals. However, aside from the existing criticisms of the validity of empirical approach and the appropriateness of specific phonological classifications (Munro & Derwing, 2006), it remains unknown whether Jenkins has reached her goals primarily due to the generalizations and abstractedness of her approach, and its failure to overcome the native and non-native dichotomy.

2.2.3 The Spoken Model of English in China

With the internationalization and localization of English, different English variants have gradually formed around the world. There are many differences among English variants, and the most obvious difference is pronunciation. However, the English pronunciation teaching and learning in EFL context has always been adhering to the native-like pronunciation model, namely British English based on the recognized pronunciation (RP) and American English based on the general pronunciation (GA). These two models gain a good reputation and legal status with the support of lots of original textbooks and the perfect international assessment systems.

Although China English has existed objectively, it is only a performance variety for the purpose of international communication. It does not have the political and social conditions for its development into an institutionalized variant and cannot be regarded as a national variety (Fang, 2017). The most prominent problem is that China English has not been codified and learners have not yet accepted China English in attitude (Gao & Lin, 2010). The existing empirical studies on English language attitude and pronunciation preference in China show that the standard English in the minds of students is still American English and British English, and most of them still pursue native-like English pronunciation (Zhou & Chen, 2008; He & Li, 2009; Gao & Lin, 2010; Wang & Fang, 2020; Pan et al., 2021; Huang, 2020, Fang, 2020; Liu et al., 2023; Fang et al., 2023). This further confirms that the institutionalized variety of China English has not been fully formed, and the nativized model is not feasible in China. Therefore, English pronunciation teaching and learning now still adhere to the native

language model in China and for a long time, the evaluation of English pronunciation teaching and learning in our country takes standard British Received Pronunciation or General American English as the highest standard.

Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that there was an emergent identification with ELF seen among Chinese English learners and stressed that since English is an international language, the standard for non-native speakers to learn English successfully should be the effectiveness of communication, and the native speakers' pronunciation should no longer be used as a reference system (Xu & Fang, 2022; Liu & Fang, 2022; Pan et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2023; Wang & Fang, 2019; Huang & Hashim, 2021; Zhou et al., 2023). That is, in the context of English is widely used as a global language, the traditional monolithic model of English has been challenged as the development of World Englishes (WE) and English as a lingua franca (ELF) paradigms challenge the ownership of English. Based on Kumaravadivelu's (2006) post-method language teaching on concepts of particularity, practicality, and possibility, Fang (2020) has proposed using the Teaching of Pronunciation for Intercultural Communication (ToPIC) approach for pronunciation teaching from the paradigm of English as a global language. ToPIC focuses on 'revisiting teaching contexts, models and norms', 'raising teachers' and students' language awareness', and 'reinforcing accent exposure and fostering communication strategy' (2020: 99). Moreover, it is important to develop critical linguistic awareness in ELT to challenge the taken-for granted ideology (Kubota, 2016; Pennycook, 2017).

2.2.4 Studies on English Majors' Pronunciation Learning in China

In China, most studies in last decade focused on how different teaching modes to improve the English pronunciation level of English learners (Zhang, 2019; Sun & Xu, 2019; Pang & Gao, 2020; Song, 2019; Xu, 2020; Liu & Zhang, 2022; Xu, 2022; Yang, 2023), the relationship between English majors' learning strategies and English proficiency (Shi, 2009; Chang, 2019; Ge & Xu, 2021), learning errors and the factors influencing English pronunciation learning (Liu, 2012; Xue, 2015; Li, 2016; Zhang, 2022; Liu & Yan, 2022; Yang, 2020; Cen, 2023; Bian, 2020).

Concerning English majors' English pronunciation learning strategies, there exist differences between good pronunciation learners and poor pronunciation learners (Shi, 2009; Chang, 2019; Ge & Xu, 2021). It is clear that learning a foreign-language pronunciation is highly individual, and the learning outcomes are various. Moreover, the different uses of English pronunciation learning strategies between good pronunciation learners and poor pronunciation learners remain unsolved riddles, requiring further studies to find intuitive explanations. As for the errors made by English majors learning English pronunciation, most of studies found that the learners have problems in terms of segmental and supra-segmental aspects and displayed various individual difference factors (anxiety, self-concept, confidence, motivation etc.) lead to these errors. However, there have not been any studies from another individual differences like belief and investment perspectives to explain.

Furthermore, these studies rely on quantitative by questionnaire to know errors,

strategies and factors as well as experimental data are usually gained through to observe the English pronunciation learning outcome before and after teaching with different teaching models. The methodological design does not allow a deeper analysis of the individual's learning process and complex socio-psychological factors. To better understand the apparent individual differences in English pronunciation learning, more insightful data are necessary. Qualitative, emic research designs may provide a promising addition to the study of pronunciation learning in EFL contexts.

2.3 Research into Learners' Beliefs about Language Learning

Studies on language learning beliefs in applied linguistics are relatively new, although they are pretty mature in psychology and anthropology. Beliefs are regarded as one of the individual learner differences that can influence the process and outcomes of language learning and acquisition (Cotterall, 1995; Kern, 1995). This section first reviews the studies on the definitions and taxonomies of learner beliefs, characteristics of language learning beliefs (LLB), the research approaches of LLB, and finally recent studies about English pronunciation beliefs.

2.3.1 The Definition of Beliefs about Language Learning

There are diverse terms and definitions to describe beliefs about language learning. Barcelos (2003) listed the terms that have been used in language learning including folklinguistic theories of learning (Miller & Ginsberg, 1995), learner representations (Holec, 1987), representations (Riley, 1989, 1994), learners' philosophy of language learning (Abraham & Vann, 1987), metacognitive knowledge (Wenden, 1998, 2002),

learners' naïve psychology of learning (Wenden, 1987), cultural beliefs (Gardner, 1988), learning culture (Riley, 1997), the culture of learning languages (Barcelos, 1995) and culture of learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a). Besides, some other terms are also used to describe LLB, such as mini-theories (Hosenfeld, 1978), preconceived ideas (Horwitz, 1987, 1988), everyday knowledge (Dufva, 1994), learners' cognitions (Ellis, 2004; 2008). Table 2.1 lists the key definitions. Barcelos (2003) asserts that the existence of such numerous terms is not necessarily negative, but the different terminologies can produce confusion and messiness and indicate disagreement among researchers.

Table 2.1 Key definitions for learner beliefs about language learning

Researcher ^a	Definition ^a
Horwitz (1987) ^a	Preconceived ideas about language learning, often differing radically from the current opinions of second language scholars (p.119) ^a
Abraham and Vann (1987) ^a	A philosophy of how language is learned. (p.96) ^a
Gardner (1988) ^a	Expectations in the minds of teachers, parents and students concerning the entire second language acquisition task. (p. 110) ^a
Miller and Ginsberg (1995) ^a	Ideas that students have about language and language learning. (p.294) ^a
Cortazzi and Jin (1996) ^a	The cultural aspects of teaching and learning, what people believe about 'normal' and 'good' learning activities and processes, where such beliefs have a cultural origin. (p.230) ^a
Kalaja (1995) ^a	Socially constructed, emerging from interaction with others. (p. 196) ^a
Wenden (1998) ^a	The relatively stable information human thinkers have about their own cognitive processes and those of others. (p.516) ^a
Wenden (2002) ^a	What learners know about language learning: the nature of the task, how best to approach it, and personal factors that may inhibit or facilitate the process. (p.46) ^a
Riley (1997) ^a	A set of representations, beliefs and values related to learning that directly influence [students'] learning behaviour. (p.122) ^a
Dufva (2003) ^a	A complex and multilayered collection of viewpoints and voices rather than a well-organized and coherent schema. (p.146) ^a

The various definitions displayed in this table indicate that the interest in LLB is quite new, and there have not been any conventional terms found yet. The current literature

shows two extreme views on the actual constructs of beliefs:

(1) Static or dynamic. Some definitions treat that learner belief as static, stable, and unchanging internalized knowledge stocked in mind. For instance, Wenden (1998) defined the belief as meta-cognitive knowledge that is “the relatively stable information human thinkers have about their cognitive processes and those of others” (p. 516). Horwitz (1987) treated learner beliefs as preconceived notions. However, some emphasize the dynamic nature of learner beliefs. Goodwin and Duranti (1992) thought of beliefs as a phenomenon that is socially constituted, interactively sustained, and time-limited. Hosenfeld (2003) believed that beliefs are embedded in constantly changing and dynamic experiences. Similarly, Dufva (2003) portrayed belief as a complex and multi-level collection of opinions and voices instead of logic and coherent schema.

(2) Erroneous or subjective reality. Horwitz (1987; 1988) treated the learner's belief as a "myth," "misconception," or "naïve" and as misleading and defective when compared with the opinions of language scholars. She believed those learner beliefs are wrong, counterproductive, and harmful to learning and autonomous learning. Mantle-Bromley (1995) argued that learners' beliefs might constitute a serious obstacle influencing their language-related attitudes and behaviors. Wenden (1987) also considered the learners' beliefs as "fallible" knowledge. On the contrary, Riley (1997) contended that some learners' beliefs "may be wrong" in terms of scientific truth. However, the purpose of their research is not to find "the truth" but the "subjective reality" of learners, "their truth." He insisted that the learners' beliefs rather than anybody else's influence their

learning (p.127). Hosenfeld (2003) also conveyed a similar perspective, arguing that learners' own beliefs influence their learning behaviors. Barkuizen (1998) even argued that learners' beliefs might not be inferior to teachers' beliefs and some learners' beliefs are pretty similar to those of the literature of applied linguistics.

(3) Cognitive entity or socially constructed phenomenon. Some researchers regarded beliefs as cognitive entities which are located in the mind. Various terms are used to describe beliefs as “idea” (Miller & Ginsberg, 1995), “assumptions” (Holec, 1987), “beliefs” (Abraham & Vann, 1987), “knowledge” (Wenden, 1998). However, other researchers thought that learners’ beliefs result from their social experience, the interactions with the environment, and the situation they are in. For example, learners’ beliefs were defined as “socially conditioned” (Sakui & Gaies, 1999, p. 48), “relational and responsive to context” (Benson & Lor, 1994, p. 464), “cultural assumptions... based upon their previous educational experience, previous (present) readings about language learning and contact with other people” (Barcelos, 2003, p. 9). Moreover, they are “the cultural aspects of teaching and learning” and “have a cultural origin” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, p. 230). According to the literature, I suggest the language learners’ beliefs are understood as follows:

(1) Beliefs are both static and dynamic. Some learners’ beliefs are relatively stable and unwilling to change. These beliefs are from the learners’ direct experience and are relevant to their own identity. It takes time to change those beliefs. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) classify these beliefs as descriptive beliefs based on people’s direct experience,

and they have the greatest degree of certainty. However, other beliefs, especially informational beliefs, are dynamic and prone to change. These beliefs are not from direct experience, so they may change their previous views about an object when they get new information.

(2) Beliefs are both conscious and unconscious. Some beliefs are conscious. When asked, learners can express themselves clearly. Woods (2003) named these beliefs as "abstract beliefs." That is to say, we claim to believe a set of propositions about "how things are" and "how things should be" (Woods, 2003, p. 207). In contrast, some beliefs are unconscious because they are deeply rooted in one's culture and growth. They guide learners' behavior unconsciously. Argyris and Schön (1974) called them "theories-in-use," and Woods (2003) called them "beliefs in action." These implicit beliefs must be inferred from the learners' behaviors.

(3) Beliefs are cognitive constructs and are socially constructed and contextually situated. The acknowledgment of the social dimension of beliefs is the recognition of its dynamic nature, which means cognition does not only take place in a person's mind but also emerges in the process. Context is not the external setting of internal cognitive phenomena but a component of cognition. This view is clearly expressed in many post-positivist research paradigms of psychology, such as ecological psychology (Gibson, 1978) or dialogical psychology (Shotter, 1995). Therefore, beliefs are socially (co)constructed and then internalized in their minds.

(4) Beliefs are influential. There is a consensus in the literature that beliefs affect learners' learning methods and their expectations of the outcomes of their efforts (Wenden, 1998). Meanwhile, belief influences their learning behaviors (Riley, 1997) and the degree of learners' success (Abraham & Vann, 1987).

2.3.2 Approaches to Investigation of Language Learning Beliefs

The current studies on language learning beliefs adopt several different research approaches. Barcelos (2003) makes a distinction among three different approaches (normative, metacognitive, and contextual) to studying learners' beliefs about language acquisition based on the definition for belief, methodology, the conceptualized relationship between beliefs and behaviors, as well as advantages and disadvantages. However, Barcelos admitted that in practice, the distinction of these three approaches might not be so straightforward.

Beliefs are typically defined as stable preconceived notions, myths, and misconceptions (Barcelos, 2003b), which are often surveyed with the help of Likert-type questionnaires and descriptive statistics. The BALLI (The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory) is a widely used and partially modified questionnaire developed by Horwitz (1985). Her study is one of the pioneering works in this field. This kind of questionnaire has the advantages of accuracy, clarity, potential anonymity, and flexibility in time, place, and resources. It is suitable for a large number of participants and outside contexts (Barcelos, 2003b).

However, there are also some serious limitations in that. They cannot guarantee a consistent interpretation of questionnaire statements by individuals. It is challenging to investigate the unmediated beliefs of learners who often tend to structure their answers based on the statements expected by the researchers (Dufva, 2003; Kallenbach, 1996). In other words, statements in the questionnaire do not measure learners' beliefs but are responses to the beliefs presented by researchers (Dufva, 2003). The questionnaire does not allow conclusions to be drawn from students' beliefs about actual learning behaviors because the breadth and depth of the data appear to be limited and the individual learners' cases are often ignored (Grotjaha, 2003). Therefore, these studies are limited to building a causal relationship between beliefs and behaviors (Barcelos, 2003b), provided that people are aware of their beliefs and can accurately report these beliefs (Woods, 2003). To overcome the limitations of the etic and quantitative research methods, some researchers attempt to verify their results by providing learners with supplementary opportunities to articulate their own beliefs, such as interviews and essays (Huang & Tsai, 2003).

Another research method of studying learners' learning beliefs is the meta-cognitive approach, which defines learners' learning beliefs as meta-cognitive knowledge. It can be explored through semi-structured interviews and self-reported oral statements, and then analyzed them through content analysis (Barcelos, 2003b). Although interviews enable learners to elaborate and reflect on their own experiences, the purpose of this approach is to divide learners' language beliefs into more or less favorable by only using learners' statements. Thus, beliefs are not inferred from actions, and the

contextual factors are still ignored. Both normative and metacognitive methods seem to adopt a fairly simplified view, leading researchers to (a) compare the learners with the successful and autonomous ideal, thereby ignoring the learners' individualities, and (b) to regard beliefs as fixed prior constructs (Barcelos, 2003b). However, compared with widely used normative methods, metacognitive methods have only been applied in a few studies, such as Goh (1997); Wenden (1986, 1987); Victori and Lockhart (1995).

In order to have a more in-depth and less generalized understanding of learners' beliefs in a specific context, more and more current researchers focus on this field from a broader perspective, which is called contextual approach by Barcelos (2003b). Grotjahn (2003) describes its purpose fittingly: *“Um ein wirkliches Verständnis des Forschungsgegenstandes Lehren und Lernen von Sprachen zu erreichen, ist sowohl das Verstehen von Intentionen und Handlungsgründen aus der Innenperspektive als auch eine kausale Erklärung der beobachtbaren Handlungen und Verhaltensweisen aus der Außenperspektive notwendig”* (p. 497). Contextual studies are diversified in the theoretical framework such as neo-Vygotsky sociocultural (Alannan, 2003; Yang & King, 2011), Bakhtinian (Dufva, 2003), Deweyan (Barcelos, 2000) and ecological approaches (Peng, 2011). These studies also use different methods to investigate and explain the beliefs of learners, such as ethnographydiaries, classroom observations and narratives, and discourse and metaphor analysis (Barcelos, 2003b). In addition, triangulation is often used to study a subject with different methods, verifying the consistency of data and results (Aguado & Riemer, 2001). Therefore, beliefs are interpreted as contextual, dynamic, and social constructs that should be analyzed from a

fairly qualitative, interpretative, and emic perspective. Woods (2003) summarizes that the issue of study on beliefs is not the accuracy of belief but the process of construction and reconstruction of belief for specific situated and contextualized purposes. Because of the time-consuming nature of most contextual methods, this approach is more proper for small samples.

In summary, the normative and the meta-cognitive approaches do not consider the nature of beliefs based on experience or looking at beliefs from the learners' perspective but only at their statements. The contextual approach is closer to a more heuristic view of beliefs, but this approach is more time-consuming and more suitable for small samples. Therefore, only a contextual research design can gain insights into the underlying processes and factors to investigate why learners hold some specific beliefs, how their beliefs fit with others they own, and how their beliefs are connected to their actions.

2.3.3 Theoretical Frameworks related to English Learning Beliefs

The scholars adopt various theoretical frameworks to study learners' belief in the contextual approach such as phenomenographical (White, 1999), neo-Vygotskian sociocultural (Alanen, 2003; Yang & Kim, 2011), Bakhtinian (Dufva, 2003), Deweyan (Barcelos, 2000), and ecological approaches (Peng, 2011). In this section, I will review some contextual studies. They used different data collection methods and theories to analyze the data to better understand learners' views on second language acquisition.

The research of Navarro and Thornton (2011) aimed to investigate the relationship between learners' beliefs and behaviors in the self-directed learning context. English majors at a Japanese university took a course that combined classwork with two three-week periods of individualized out-of-class learning. Students arranged their learning plans, set learning goals, determined, and carried out activities to achieve these goals during the process. Wenden (1998) proposed that in order to manage their learning successfully, students needed to be able to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning. Navarro and Thornton (2011) added that implementing the learner's plan was equally important for self-regulated learning, so they incorporated it into their PIME model (planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating). The data were collected through a closed-end questionnaire, an open-ended questionnaire, a metaphor activity, reflectivediaries, advising sessions, self-reports, and language learning histories.

Navarro and Thornton said students' behavior might be the most reliable indicator of their beliefs in a self-directed learning environment. The triangulation of students' statements with documentation of their learning behaviors allowed researchers to demonstrate the complex relationship between beliefs and actions. That is, how successful experiences can fortify and refine emergent beliefs and how earlier beliefs were less likely to change and continued to influence the processing of new information, which supported the idea that some beliefs are stable at least. Some students' beliefs were appropriated from their advisors and then reinforced by the success of their learning actions. The uniqueness of the study was that the researchers were the advisers for the course. On the one hand, it enabled them to better see students' behaviors and

their impact on beliefs. On the other hand, in their interaction, researchers verbally challenged some students' beliefs through the evaluation of their work. Therefore, the advisor's beliefs may be appropriated by students due to existing power relationships and future assessments in the course.

White (1999) also investigated the dynamics of learners' beliefs in the self-directed learning context. That is to describe the phenomenon (a language course) from learners' eyes and analyze their learning experience and ideas. The study was designed to prevent researchers from co-constructing the students' experience. After each of the five phases of the study, the received data was initially analyzed to develop procedures for the next phase, which revealed more details. White (1999) used a variety of data collection methods: interviews, open-ended questionnaires, responses to statements of expectations, ranking exercises, and scenarios.

The results showed that novice learners had particular beliefs and expectations about self-direction and as experience accumulates, they revised and altered their beliefs. Three core belief structures emerged at the beginning of the research: the concept of self-directed learning, the expectation of success, and control. As research proceeded, most learners' beliefs and expectations in these areas changed. Students had different views on their roles in the context of self-instructed: they constructed a more effective relationship with language materials, learned to tolerate ambiguity, and changed from external to internal control. During the adjustment process, beliefs helped learners adapt to their environment.

Some scholars(Alanen, 2003; Yang & Kim, 2011) applied neo-Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of mind to their research. Alanen (2003) studied how Finnish children aged 7-9 formed language learning beliefs through an 18-month longitudinal study. Examining the dialogue between the interviewer and the learners indicated how signs of other regulation (the outstanding role of others in the child's environment) were replaced with the appropriation of significant other people's words and, ultimately, with self-regulation. Alanen (2003) believes that significant others play the role of human mediators for child learners and help them build new mediators--- belief--- which may make an influence in children's language learning behavior in the future.

Yang and Kim (2011) adopt sociocultural theory to study the second language beliefs under the background of study abroad. The data such as autobiographies, interviews, diary entries, and stimulated recall tasks were collected from two Korean English learners before, during, and after studying in the United States and the Philippines for several months (9 months and five months respectively). Before going abroad, learners had similar views on the benefits of the selected program to improve their second language level. However, in the program process, their beliefs were reoriented, resulting in qualitatively different L2 learning. One learner's belief shift led to active participation in various communities and the development of second language productive skills, the other learner's belief change led to losing motivation to interact with native English speakers and concentrating on exam preparation. Yang and Kim (2011) believed that second language learners' beliefs will constantly change with their goals and

experiences. The change and appropriation of beliefs can regulate learners' behavior, and the coordination between beliefs and the learning environment is the key to maintain second language learning motivation.

In addition to the sociocultural approach, Dufva (2003) adopted the dialogue approach first proposed by Bakhtin (1981) when she analyzed the beliefs of Finnish language learners. Unlike mainstream cognitive psychology and Chomskyan linguistics that highlight the autonomy and independence of the human mind, she argued that beliefs are cognitive phenomena and should be analyzed as subjective experiences because they always reflect a particular point of view and grow from the social cultural context.

Dufva (2003) opposed the use of yes/no questionnaires in belief studies because the data may not show "what the subjects believe, but, rather, how they relate to the formulations presented to them by the researcher" (p. 146). She gathered data from various forms of personal narratives: interviews, group discussions, and written narratives, and these multiple data sources enabled participants to make their voices heard. She examined not only what the participants said but also how they said it. She insisted that the voice of researchers is always inevitable in the process of data collection and interpretation, which should be considered.

Dufva (2003) proved that belief is situated, dynamic and multi-voiced. They always reflect a particular viewpoint generated by the interaction between the individual and the social as well as cultural background. They may change in a person's life or even in

a new discourse situation. Beliefs can contain several different and even conflicting views from personal experience, society, the media, or school education.

Peng (2011) used an ecological approach to investigate the changes in English learning beliefs of Chinese first-year students. Various methods were used to analyze the first seven months of the students' college study, such as learning diaries, class observations, and semi-structured interviews. The results showed that beliefs were emergent and context. The study found that course goals, teaching methods, classroom activities, teacher and peer support affected participants' beliefs.

Barcelos (2003) applied an ethnographic approach to study the relationship between the beliefs of American ESL teachers and the beliefs of Brazilian students. Based on Dewey's (1938) concepts of experience, belief and identity, the findings showed that there was a complex relationship between students' and teachers' beliefs about second language acquisition. In the classroom, both teachers and students interpreted each other's beliefs consciously or unconsciously, affecting how they teach or learn. If the beliefs of teachers and students did not match, it might be difficult for both sides to get their views recognized, and they may take action to verify their beliefs.

In the research of Barcelos (2003), one teacher-student pair had conflicting beliefs about grammar instruction, and both of them adapted and adjusted to their belief conflicts. The teacher's interpretation of her students' beliefs shaped her classroom practice: she compromised some of her beliefs to take care of the beliefs of some students and tried

to offset the beliefs of other students. The student felt quite depressed at the beginning of the course, questioned the teacher's credibility, and showed passive resistance. Later, the conflict made her take a more active and autonomous role. The researcher displayed that the beliefs of teachers and students were shaped and reshaped by their past and present experiences, interactions, and identities construction.

The potential belief conflicts between teachers and students could lead to miscommunication, misunderstanding, and depression among students. Therefore, identifying this mismatch can avoid potential conflicts if teachers can more clearly explain their purpose and rationale behind all classroom activities. Teachers and learners must be aware of their beliefs and expectations of the other. Gathering feedback from students on the classroom process, reflecting on their perceptions of the SLA, and comparing them with those of students, may help teachers identify potential sources of miscommunication or conflicts. Barcelona (2003) suggested that it may be significant to "bargain" with students at the beginning of adjusting different expectations.

In summary, they use different data collection methods and theories to analyze the data to better study learners' views on second language acquisition. What unites them is the focus on situated, dynamic, and sometimes contradictory nature of belief, the portrayal of students as social beings, the use of students' interpretations of their experiences, and the inference of beliefs from their intentions and actions (Barcelos, 2003; Richardson, 1996).

2.3.4 Studies on Learners' Beliefs about English Pronunciation Learning

While learner beliefs have been investigated in various areas in language learning acquisition, the learning and teaching of language pronunciation are obviously scarce among the literature on language acquisition beliefs (Brown, 2009). So far, only a small number of studies have been conducted in this area. Current results have highlighted the significance of this research field because learners' beliefs not only provide clues about the learners' views on the nature of the learning process, but also influence the acquisition process and the actual actions of learners (Cenoz & García Lecumberri, 1999). With such awareness, research on EFL pronunciation learners' belief has started attracting more attention.

The focus of this line of research, however, is limited to few aspects including mainly the technology for English pronunciation learning such as ASR (Inceoglu et al., 2020), the importance learners place on English pronunciation and/or pronunciation learning (Kanellou, 2011; Rajadurai, 2001; Cenoz & García Lecumberri, 1999; Pawlak, 2015; Phuong, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2021), their attitudes towards English accents, ELF, EIL, and their goals in learning pronunciation (Jindapitak, 2015; Kanellou, 2011; Timmis, 2002; Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011; Waniek & Klimczak, 2008; Szyszka, 2021). In addition, some research attention focuses on learners' preferences or difficulties in pronunciation learning (Benzies, 2013; Pawlak, 2015) and English pronunciation strategies (Simon & Taverniers, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2021; Macalister & Nation, 2020; Szyszka, 2021). Another topic of research interest is learners' beliefs about the factors influencing pronunciation acquisition (Cenoz & García Lecumberri, 1999;

Szyska,2021). As language is closely linked with identity, efforts have also been made to explore how EFL learners sense themselves when pronouncing English (Szyska, 2011; Trofimovich & Gatbonton, 2006; Huang & Hashim, 2021, Kong & Kang, 2022), and how their pronunciation self-perception affects their oral performance (Szyska, 2011; Inceoglu et al., 2020).

The point of essence is that most of the aforementioned studies seek for learners' views by means of only questionnaires. Two others employ speech evaluation tasks. I suppose these means of data collection would significantly limit the opportunities for learners to bring their views into in-depth discussion. Secondly, these studies fragmentally discuss English pronunciation beliefs regarding the importance, difficulty, learning content, learning goals, learning strategies separately. Further studies can research these components together to comprehensively understand learners' English pronunciation learning beliefs. Generally speaking, the study on English pronunciation learning beliefs is still in its infancy, and many issues remain to be explored.

2.4 SLA: language learning motivation and investment

Motivation and investment are two concepts that refer to psychological and sociological methods used to examine people's commitment to and desire for language learning in the context of acquiring a second language. The majority of recent advances in the study of motivation (Dorynei 2005, 2009) and investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) resulted from discontent with the once-dominant, social psychology-based dichotomous view of

language learning motivation, which was based on the concepts of instrumentality (utilitarian purposes) and integrativeness (identification with the culture and values of native speakers in the target L2 community). Gardner and his colleagues (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Gardner, 1985) originally conceptualized motivation as a rather stable individual feature based on their study on motivation for learning a second language in Canadian educational settings. In particular, it was discovered that the best indicator of L2 learning effort and achievement was integrative motivation.

However, for two primary reasons, it was discovered that this dichotomy was not valid in many different sociocultural contexts. To begin with, because language learning motivation isn't always focused on a fixed target L2 group, the integrativeness idea has become less relevant in many circumstances nowadays. For instance, as English has become a global lingua franca (Jenkins, 2007), more individuals are motivated to learn English as a living language and to collaborate with people who do not speak their native tongues. The interlocutor does not need to be a native English speaker. Furthermore, according to the World English paradigm, many learners now view the ability to speak English as a necessary component of becoming a successful global citizen as a result of globalization (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2006). Lamb (2004) found that learning English was a major motivation for the Indonesian teenagers in his study since it represented the identity of a prosperous, middle-class Indonesian living in an urban area. Similarly, Islam, Lamb, and Chambers (2013) discovered that college students in Pakistan believe that being able to speak English is essential to Pakistan's national interests abroad and a hallmark of the globalized Pakistani.

On the other hand, some researchers (Ryan, 2009; Ushioda, 2001) discovered that motivation may actually be better understood as dynamic and context-dependent and that there may not be a sharp distinction between integrativeness and instrumentality after all. In this view, the internal psychological system such as confidence and self-efficacy as well as how it interacts with external factors like peer pressure and the qualification of education will impact the motivation to learn a language (Noels, 2003). For example, in an English context, a learner who is anxious about speaking English may be deeply attracted to American cultural products such as hip-hop music and when he/she encounters a good teacher or realizes that even in his/her own country, English is crucial for his/her future career development, he/ she becomes more motivated. In another instance, Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) conducted a study in classrooms on motivation strategies also show that learners' motivation changes over the course of the entire learning trajectory and during class time. To put it succinctly, the binary distinction between integrativeness and instrumentality is insufficient to adequately represent the diversity and fluid nature of motivation in today's globalized world.

Regarding this theoretical shortcoming, inspired by the theories of Possible Selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009) and Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987), an L2 Motivational Self system comprising L2 learning experience, Ought-to L2 Self, and Ideal L2 Self was developed. Since motivation is ultimately thought of as an individual psychological construct by scholars who adhere to a more psychological approach, the two future self-guides suggesting evolution and change are the two pillars

in this paradigm. The basic assumption is that individuals will be motivated to reduce the discrepancy between their current self and their envisioned future self (“ideal L2 self”) who will enjoy life at the desired L2 level (e.g., find a good job; make more friends). This concept encompasses both integrative and instrumental promotion (intrinsic instrumental motivation). Sometimes, another future self (“ought-to self”) is influenced by external expectations and obligations to prevent negative outcomes in life. It also includes instrumentality-prevention, which involves shielding students from classmates' prejudice and parents' disappointment in their subpar academic achievement. In contrast to the future-oriented selves in this paradigm, the final component, the L2 learning experience, “is conceptualized at a different level from the two self-guides” (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29) and refers to the particular here and now in the learning context. This concept is very often operationalized as attitude toward language classes.

Empirical studies using the L2 Motivational Self System to assess L2 learning motivation has demonstrated that this recently proposed model can explain L2 learning motivation in a number of national contexts, including Indonesia (Lamb, 2004, 2012); Hungary (Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Dörnyei et al., 2006); China, Japan, and Iran (Taguchi, Magid & Papi, 2009; Ryan, 2009); Hong Kong (Gu & Cheung, 2016). Nevertheless, it should be recognized that the ideal L2 self is not always the best predictor, especially in Asian contexts. Furthermore, the fact that the constructs examined in the surveys are socioculturally context-free is another reason why this model could be able to capture certain common elements in various country contexts. Numerous researches have begun examining additional or mediating motivational

variables that they have identified as unique to the sociocultural setting in which they work. Gu and Cheung's (2016) investigation into the Chinese learning motivation of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, such as Indians and Filipinos, serves as a prime example. Apart from the self-guides and learning experiences, the researchers include variables that illustrate the degree of acculturation to both the mainstream and traditional cultures. Participants' planned attempt to learn Chinese was found to be significantly impacted by the former. However, the original L2 Motivational Self System did not incorporate these context- and culturally-dependent variables, which are supported by learners' social interaction languages (Islam et al., 2013). In Dörnyei's ternary model, the only component that focuses on the second language learning experience may to some extent imply a social background, but is limited to language courses in formal education environments. In my study, this was insufficient to capture participants' English pronunciation learning motivations as fewer English pronunciation teaching activities were involved within the classroom. Moreover, the identification of motivational variables is the primary goal of the L2 Motivational Self System. This approach does not work if the unit of analysis is an individual or a group of learners whose psychological or social uniqueness is central to the analysis. Most importantly, social factors themselves are not easily operationalized as discrete survey items in the first place. Results from qualitative aspects of previous studies have frequently contributed to our understanding of motivation (Lamb, 2004).

In contrast to the psychological approach, which is more "micro" and restricts its attention on the individual psychology in the immediate learning context, the

sociological approach to studying L2 motivation incorporates a critical look at the wider social context. In place of the term motivation, Bonny Norton's concept of language investment (Norton Pierce, 1995) is suggested because previous psychological models—Integrativeness vs Instrumentality (Gardner & Lambert, 1959)—failed to account for the language practices she observed in her five immigrant women participants' long-term language learning experience in Canada. Her theory of language investment is based on a poststructuralist understanding of identity, which holds that identity is "a site of struggle" and that language learners may have several, conflicting, and ever-evolving identities (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 20). Learners may be driven by their imagined identities in that community, which could provide insight into their future learning trajectory, but it is not possible for them to participate physically in the community they envisage. Language command is understood as a type of cultural capital that native speakers possess, drawing on Bourdieu's (1977) economic metaphor of cultural capital. The term "learners' investment in a target language" describes the will and dedication of language learners to increase their cultural capital in contexts where language use is highly valued.

However, learners' investment in a given learning environment may be significantly reduced if they feel that investment conflicts with other valued aspects of their identity. For instance, Felicia, a middle-class Peruvian immigrant who participated in Norton's study, longed for a better level of English proficiency. Despite residing in a country where English is the primary language, she did not actively practice speaking the language orally. Since she didn't speak English well, she was worried that others would

assume she was a typical poor immigrant in Canadian society and be unaware of her affluent Peruvian upbringing. Her strong desire to learn English did not align with her disengagement from language practice. Without taking the social factor into account, it would be difficult to explain this contradiction. Norton's study effectively demonstrated how the immigrant group in Canada faced discrimination from the dominant social group, but they nevertheless managed to acquire English language skills through Felicia's tale and the experiences of other strong-willed women. Norton's most recent model, which places language investment at the intersection of capital, ideology, and identity, aims to more methodically capture the unequal power relations that exist between native speakers and second language learners. According to this model, learners' desire is shaped by conflicts between agency and a set of normative ideas that “predisposes them (learners) to do what they believe is expected of them and to develop relations that are deemed appropriate” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 45). In a specific sociocultural context, this model leads our attention to the embodiment of the systemic patterns of control over and resisted by the learner, positioning of /by the learner and affordances/perceived benefits by the learner. In other words, this approach will highlight the impact of social processes on language learning motivation at a macro level by amplifying language practices. In my research, I was interested in understanding whether their future identity and phonetic abilities were related to their learning of English phonetics as well as how they deal with the kinds of contextual constraints.

In summary, a sociological perspective on language learning desire and commitment typically employs qualitative research techniques on a limited sample of students. It

views language use as a social practice that reflects power relations between interlocutors, or different (sometimes biased) social perceptions of capable speakers and developing learners. Individual learners' tales are likely to have greater explanatory power in explaining systemic inequality and symbolic violence in studies of socially disadvantaged language learners when abuse is difficult to quantify (Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991). To put it another way, it might clarify why students are (or are not) motivated to pick up a language. Typically, this method takes into account the larger social context in addition to the time scales.

When studying language learning motivation, psychologists typically gather information via questionnaires from a sizable sample of language learners who are generally similar to one another. Then, they undertake quantitative analysis to provide a broad overview of the traits of this population. Regarding motivation as a psychological concept, it seeks to identify the generalizable elements within its specific contexts that may influence it. By highlighting the significance of future vision (the future self-guides), recent advancements in this approach have also emphasized the scale of temporality. Furthermore, a number of researchers that utilize a psychological approach are aware that every sociocultural context may contain unique motivation for students to acquire a new language, for example, learning English in Pakistan to safeguard national interests, which may not be applicable in other contexts but are nevertheless worthwhile to explore. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that a psychological approach primarily focuses on the relationship between various psychological activities, for example, how the imagined future selves who speak another language can predict the intended effort. Sometimes, the

difference between the actualized effort (like observable participation in class) and the intended effort (like willingness to participate) can occasionally be quite large. Additionally, I believe that, depending on the circumstances, the gap's cause could be social, psychological, or both. Beyond this, a study based on a one-off survey ultimately produces results that reflect learners' attitudes toward a language at the moment. Therefore, the nuances and complexity of language learners' language learning, in my opinion, cannot be fully understood by the use of surveys and quantitative analysis alone.

By going over both the sociological and psychological approaches, I hope to show that even though there is a cognitive-social divide between them in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and that their research focuses are different, their research methods can complement one another in certain cases (Zuengler & Miller, 2006). The field of SLA has long called on researchers to draw judiciously on research methods from different epistemological positions so that they can "focus on authentic, real-world language learning problems that require input and collaboration from many research areas in second language studies" (King & Mackey, 2016, p.222). In my study that focuses on the English pronunciation learning experience of Chinese English major students , I adopted a qualitative approach. The main method used in this study was case study work informed by the concept of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) through which I tap into how adults' Chinese English major students' language achievement, practice and learning motivation are mediated by their social positions and language ideologies.

2.4.1 Investment in the Form of Language Learning Strategies

A groundbreaking paper by Rubin (1975) marked the beginning of language learning strategy (LLS) research, sparking investigation into "how learners manage their learning and the strategies they use as a means of improving their target language competence" (White, 2008, p. 8). Most researchers (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Griffiths & Inceçay, 2016; Oxford, 2017) using an LLS framework have adopted cognitive psychology approaches, which interpret language acquisition as primarily occurring in the minds of individual learners and view individual differences as the key to learning (p. 52). From this cognitive perspective, LLSs are typically defined as "proactive, self-regulated language learning improvement" actions consciously chosen by learners (Oxford et al., 2014, p.30). Theoretically, by limiting learners' success in language learning to achieving language goals and having cognitive characteristics, with little attention to the importance of "learners' life experiences in real life", an individualistic and static picture of language learning tends to develop (Palfreyman, 2003, p. 244). Therefore, there lack of fully consideration the dynamic interactions between individuals and other social participants, as well as the constantly changing LLS deployment and improvement of L2 identity as they strive to establish themselves in their own environment. However, recent LLS research is redressing the balance by incorporating sociocultural approaches as a useful lens through which qualitative methods are used to disentangle the actual and dynamic nature of LLS in light of language learners' changing circumstances and learning goals. (Hajar, 2016; Huang, 2016). Related to this, Huang and Andrews (2010) identify two core concepts that link the LLS field to sociocultural theory, namely "strategic interaction with the contexts and goal orientation" (p. 20). That is to say,

language learners always choose and use LLS to achieve specific learning goals, which are closely shaped and reshaped through the quantity and quality of material language resources, as well as the support or obstacles they receive from other influential social agents, mainly language teachers and parents. However, this is not to underestimate the importance of learner agency, as it requires the ability of humans to think, wish, and act when recognizing the importance of specific activities in achieving ultimate goals and expected identities (Gkonou, 2015).

Consistent with this argument, Norton (2013) introduced the concept of "investment" in language learning research to understand the relationship between language learners and the constantly changing social world, as well as the connection between learners' desire and commitment to learning language and their complex and constantly changing identities. Norton (2013) observed that learning a target language is not entirely determined by contextual reality, and that contextual reality itself changes. Furthermore, language learners are thought of as situated active agents, who tend to 'question, challenge, and reposition themselves' by embracing specific language learning strategies (LLSs) to help themselves accomplish their language learning goals (Norton, 2015, p. 379). To demonstrate this, Hajar (2016) documented the strategic language learning efforts and second language identity development of a female English graduate student from a rural area of Iraq. This participant, Noura, needed to attain a high score in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam as a precondition to getting an unconditional offer from a UK university.

Hajar(2016) found that throughout Noura's academic education process, her motivation to learn English was limited to achieving the minimum passing score on mandatory English exams, and due to various contextual constraints she encountered in the socio-cultural environment, she was detached from any real-life purpose. Thus, at this point, Nora mostly uses “mandatory/imposed strategies” that are placed upon her by strong forces, primarily her English teacher, such as rote memorization, note-taking, and repetition. However, after obtaining her master's degree, Nora took proactive action and achieved her ultimate vision, becoming the first woman in the village to complete her graduate studies abroad and participating in Iraq's economic development. In order to meet the necessary TOEFL score and fulfill her personal goal, she used a number of "voluntary strategies" that were more internalized by her and less imparted by others. For example, she developed a friendship with a Canadian coworker at work and often saw English-language television.

2.4.2 Norton’s investment and identity in language learning

2.4.2.1 Identity as multiple and contradictory

Poststructuralism depicts the subject as diverse, contradictory and changing over historical time and social space. “Subjectivity is conceived of as multiple rather than unitary, decentered rather than centered” (Norton, 2000, p.125). This position has crucial implications for understanding language learners' learning trajectories. It helped Norton (2000) to make sense of the data from her longitudinal case study in Canada, which made a valuable contribution to the study of SLA and offered new perspectives on understanding language learning. Through her two-year involvement in the lives of

five adult immigrant women in Canada, Norton painted detailed individual portraits of the ways in which opportunities to practice speaking English were socially structured and shaped by the women's shifting and contradictory identities. For example, Martina, a participant in Norton's study, has multiple identities: she is a Czech immigrant, a mother of two children, a wife, a language learner and a worker at a restaurant. As an immigrant woman, she felt "uncomfortable using English in the group of people whose English language is their mother tongue because they speak fluently without any problems..." (p.126). In the workplace, she was excluded from social anglophone networks as she said: they "loved talking but not with me" (Norton, 2013a, p.136). Significantly, however, despite feelings of inferiority and marginalization, Martina refused to be silenced by her co-workers who humiliated and positioned her as a "broom" and asserted herself as a successful user of English.

This great change in Martina's data, as Norton and Toohey note (2011), could be explained by the fact that Martina "reframed her relationship with her co-workers as domestic rather than professional, and from the identity position 'mother', rather than 'immigrant' or 'broom', she claimed the right to speak" (p. 413). Her identity as a mother and primary caregiver in the home enabled her to violate the appropriate rules of use between supposedly "legitimate" speakers of English (anglophone Canadians) and imposters (Bourdieu, 1977) and to resist exploitation by her co-workers. Through the help of her children, she learned how to serve customers and actively took the initiative to serve the customers.

The story of Martina is a sobering reminder of the diverse, multiple positions from which language learners are able to participate in social life and speak, and demonstrate how learners can, but sometimes cannot, appropriate more desirable identities that prompt them to take more opportunities to speak the TL. As Martina found, some identity positions may limit and constrain opportunities for learners to listen, speak, read, or write in the TL (e.g., immigrant, refugee, Muslim, working-class, broom), while other identity positions may offer enhanced sets of possibilities for social interaction and human agency (e.g., mother, primary caregiver, white, middle-class). To sum up, taking up the mother identity in the workplace provided Martina with more opportunities to speak English and to resist exploitation.

2.4.2.2 Identity as changing over time and place

According to Norton (2000), identity is multiple, fluid, and a site of struggle, depending upon the contexts and interlocutors interacting with the language learner. The concept of identity as changing is a logical extension of the position that identity is multiple, contradictory and a site of struggle. As Weedon (1997) argues, “the political significance of decentering the subject and abandoning the belief in essential subjectivity is that it opens up subjectivity to change” (p.32). The conception of identity as changing has important political implications for language teachers and educators; it opens up possibilities for educational intervention and change. It is important to point out here that language learners’ multiple identities are more subject to transformation and re-negotiation when they move into new communities of practice (Kanno, 2000).

Identity changes have been documented in numerous SLA studies investigating the reciprocal relationship between identity and language learning (Block, 2007, 2012; Ellwood 2009; Gao et al. 2015; Giroir, 2014a, 2014b; Kanno, 2000; Kinginger, 2004; Makubalo, 2007; Pavlenk, 2000; Sacchi, 2014; Skapoulli, 2019; Vasilopoulos, 2015; Shi&Guo, 2021; Shahidzade&Mazdayasna, 2022). This, nonetheless, does not mean that language learning is always a trans-formative experience or individuals do not change. However, from the vast literature, I would agree that L2 socialization and participation in a new community of practice is to a large extent a journey of identity (re)construction (Norton, 2000; Pavlenko, 2000). Having looked at the dynamic of identity and its interrelationship with language learning, I now turn to discuss how power is implicated in language learning.

2.4.2.3 Power, Identity and Resistance

Another key contribution of investment is that it seeks to better understand (1) the subtle ways in which power operates in society and the language classroom, constraining or enabling human action and (2) the relationship between power and identity.

Power, as Norton puts it, “references the socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions and communities through which symbolic and material resources in a society are produced, distributed and validated” (2013a, p.47). Material resources refer to money, real estate, occupation and capital goods, while symbolic

resources include language, friendship, recognition, knowledge and education. Power appears to exist at all levels of human activity and practice, from macro-level relations between governments to micro-level interactions between people on a moment-to-moment basis, interactions that are obviously produced by language (Foucault, 1980). Yet although “power is everywhere” and “comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 1998, p.63), it is often invisible in that it frequently naturalizes events and practices in ways that come to be seen as “normal” to members of a community (Foucault, 1980). Following Foucault (1980), Pennycook (2007) takes the position that power is neither monolithic nor invariant. Rather, it must be understood as “contingent, shifting and produced in the particular, rather than having some prior ontological status” (p.39). Power could be conceived of as a source of social discipline and thus positive and necessary when it enables and empowers individuals to act as members of communities of practice and as negative when it disempowers and constrains the capacity to act (Block, 2007).

That said, what is the relationship between power, identity and language learning? Researchers such as Weedon (1997), Bourdieu (1977), West (2014), and Cummins (1996) are particularly helpful in this regard. The control and distribution of material and symbolic resources are inextricably connected to each other, as well as to language socialization and identity negotiation. The question “who am I?” cannot be separated from the question “what material and symbolic resources do I have access to?” (West, 2014; Bourdieu, 1977). People who have access to a wide range of material and symbolic resources in a given community will have access to privilege, recognition and

power, which will in turn influence their relationship to the world and hence their identities and language learning. In return, individuals who have more linguistic and language learning resources will have greater social and cultural capital and thus more power (Bourdieu, 1991). “Relations of power can serve to enable or constrain the range of identities that language learners can negotiate in their classrooms and communities” (Norton, 2013a, p.49). In the case of constraining, issues of resistance and agency will arise (Canagarajah, 1999). The relationship between power, identity, resistance and language learning has become a compelling and interesting area of research in SLA. There has been a considerable body of research which acknowledges that power inequalities are reproduced in language classroom contexts and teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) practice is not value free nor apolitical (Kanno, 2000; Majumdar, 2010; Pennycook, 2001; Rich & Troudi 2006). Yet, power is not one dimensional and it could be faced with elements of opposition (Giroux, 1983). Interest has focused on how language learners might be subjected to others and marginalization with consequences to their language learning and how they act upon it.

For example, Talmy (2004) shows how long-term ESL students who had come to Hawaii in childhood were positioned as “non-native speakers” and mixed with “fresh-off-the-boat” (FOB) newcomers. This imbalance of power was exemplified through a class assignment in which students were asked to prepare presentations on holidays from their own country or culture. The proposal of two of the long-term ESL students to report on Christmas and New Year's was rejected by their American teacher as being unacceptable holidays for the project. “Christmas and New Year's belong to her, not

them” (Talmy, 2004, p.160). However, the students challenged this claim and resisted being positioned as FOB out-group. They insisted on their project proposals as an attempt to reposition themselves as members of non-FOB in-group. They were ultimately allowed to focus on Christmas and New Year, which might be seen as a “victory”. Another compelling instance in Talmy (2004) of how classrooms are sites of cultural politics (Simon, 1992) is when the same long term, more-proficient ESL students who resisted being positioned as FOBs then positioned a recently-arrived, lower proficient student, Issac, as FOB and plain stupid. In fact, positioning Isaac as FOB, or reproducing the very inequality of labeling, was another important form of resistance the ESL students employed to reject the stigmatizing identity category imposed on them initially by their teacher. This study supports the findings of Toohey (1998) and Manke (1997) that the teacher is not necessarily always the center of power and corroborates what Foucault argues that power comes from everywhere.

Resistance to classroom practice and power inequalities in wider society can take a variety of forms: setting up counter-discourses (Giroir, 2014a; McKay & Wong 1996; Norton, 2000; Talmy, 2004), re-articulating new subject positions (Giroir, 2014a; Majumdar, 2010; Norton, 2000; Talmy, 2004), silence (Skinnari, 2014), playing dumb (Worth, 2008), being passive and creating glosses in textbooks during class (Canagarajah, 1999), feigning misunderstanding what the teacher told them to do (Manke, 1997), making the discourse of the classroom “disorderly” through challenges, interruptions and disagreements (Fairclough, 1995), claiming forgetfulness in completing or turning in an assignment (Talmy, 2008), or refusing to follow the teacher’s instructions (Miller & Zuengler, 2011; Liu & Tannacito, 2013). However,

rejecting strongly deterministic understandings of power, it is important to point out here that power is not always oppressive (Foucault, 1980) and that practices of resistance do not always “lead to transformative change but can result in entrenched inequalities” (Canagarajah, 1993, 1999; Talmy, 2008) (Miller, 2015, p.462). Giroux (1983) cautions against allowing the concept of resistance “to become a category indiscriminately hung over every expression of oppositional behavior” (p.110).

Adopting a micro-ethnographic approach, Canagarajah’s research (1993,1999) among Tamil-speaking students who were enrolled in his English class at a Sri Lankan university demonstrates why L2 students’ oppositional behaviours are important foci for investigation and the inseparability of resistance, identity and language learning. The Sri Lankan students enacted their resistance most visibly by not coming to class and by being passive and reluctant to participate in communicative practices. This passivity, however, was contradicted by their active participation in the classroom “underlife” through creating “glosses”, which incorporated aspects of their lived culture in their textbooks during class. Canagarajah recognizes that these glosses served as counter-discourses to the discourses implicitly advocated in the textbooks, discourses which made students feel “alien, incompetent, inferior, and powerless” (1999, p. 91). Canagarajah argues that students engaged in glossing because they could do so from a “safe distance” (1999, p.95); glossing protected them from perceived threats to their identities and enabled them to maintain their cultural integrity.

Importantly, however, Canagarajah notes that students’ actions prevented them from

learning critically and they are better described as escapist rather than transformative or interrogational. They themselves contributed to their own subjugation. As such, these oppositional behaviours do not align with Giroux's (1983) definition of resistance as radical, politically informed acts. Canagarajah's research serves as a good reminder for researchers interested in resistance, myself included, to develop a nuanced, critical understanding of resistance that goes beyond the traditional dichotomy of oppressed/resistance and includes notions of "escape".

Understanding how power operates subtly and invisibly, and how language learners are positioned by relations of power and resistant to that positioning, is key to making sense of their stories of language learning and to paint a full, deep picture of what is actually going on in the classroom and beyond. A few studies, however, listened to the voices of language learners in both classroom and community settings (Giroir, 2014a; Brown, 2014). Studies focused either on learners in formal settings (Canagarajah, 1993,1999; Duff, 2002; McKay & Wong,1996; Menard-Warwick, 2007; Talmy, 2004, 2008) or in natural settings (Block, 2006b; Darvin & Norton, 2014; Norton, 2000; Ray, 2015). That realized, the current study will take a holistic approach through capturing the stories of the English major students in China at the micro- (EFOL classroom) and macro-level (wider society). I believe in the inseparability of both sites to investigate the language being learned, the power being exercised and the identities under negotiation. Having explored the relationship interplay among power, identity and investment, the next section discusses the imagined communities and imagined identities.

2.4.2.4 Imagined communities and imagined identities

An extension of interest in investment and identity is the imagined communities language learners aspire to when they learn an L2 (Norton, 2001, 2013a; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Drawing on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998), Kanno and Norton (2003) propose that imagined communities “refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination” (p.241). Simply put, imagined communities are where and with whom language learners imagine themselves to be in the future. Language learners can feel a sense of connectedness and community with people they have not met; imagined affiliations expand over time and place. “These imagined communities are no less real than the ones in which learners have daily engagement and might even have a stronger impact on their current actions and investment” (Norton, 2013a, p. 8). How does, then, the notion of imagined communities enhance our understanding of investment, identity and language learning opportunities? Norton (2001) argues that a learner’s imagined community invites an imagined identity, and a learner’s investment in the TL must be understood with reference to their imagined communities and identities. The following example may help to render this vision more concrete.

Norton (2000, 2001) describes the language experiences of Katarina, an immigrant from Poland who resisted participation in her ESL class. When Katarina expressed her wish to take a computer course, her ESL teacher discouraged her saying that her English was not “good enough” to take the computer course. Greatly insulted, Katarina dropped out of the ESL course after four months. She was a highly motivated language learner, but

was not invested in her English teacher and the language practices of her ESL classroom. Katarina had been a veteran teacher in Poland, and although she could not find employment as a teacher (her imagined identity) in Canada, she continued to view herself as having a legitimate claim to professional status. When her teacher discouraged her from taking the course, Katarina felt that she was positioned as a “mere immigrant” and that she was being denied an important opportunity to her imagined community of professionals. The teacher was not aware of the relationship between Katarina’s investment in learning English and her professional imagined identity. Katarina’s disinvestment resulted from a disjuncture between her imagined community and the teacher’s educational vision. It is interesting to note, however, that Katarina entered the computer course, where her future affiliation and identification were validated, and successfully completed it. Katarina’s imagined community thus was not simply wish-oriented where there is no possibility of action. Rather, it was hope-oriented. ‘Hope’ that, as Simon argues, “is constituted in the need to imagine an alternative human world and to imagine it in a way that enables one to act in the present as if this alternative had already begun to emerge” (1992, p.4). In another study, Cooke (2006) points out how the lack of an imagined community and identity for an asylum seeker in the UK had a negative impact on his investment in learning English as his life was entirely dictated by a decision from the Home Office.

The notion of imagined communities has great implications for bridging theory and practice, for informing critical and trans-formative language pedagogy, and making sense of language learners’ stories. In this spirit, Early and Norton (2012) argue that one

of the most important features for language researchers, teachers and schools in the 21st century is to link “language learner stories and imagined identities” (p.196). Imagined identities can be a rich resource which helps the teachers construct classroom activities that engage language learners and that contribute to their desired trajectories towards participation in their imagined communities. These issues have been explored by a vast number of scholars in different regions of the world. Examples include: Chang 2011 (USA); Cooke 2006 (UK). Darvin and Norton 2016 (Canada and Uganda); Friedman 2016(Ukraine); Kanno 2008 (Japan); Kendrick and Jones 2008 (Uganda); Makubalo 2007(South Africa); Norton and Gao 2008 (China); Norton and Kamal 2003 (Pakistan); Yim 2016 (South Korea); Sung 2019(Hong Kong); Wu 2017(Taiwan); Wu and Jiang 2024(Mainland China), Huang and Hashim 2021(Mainland China), Kong and Kang 2022(Korea). There is also a co-edited special issue of Language, Identity, and Education on “Imagined communities and educational possibilities” (Kanno & Norton 2003). In a summary, above studies have elucidated the importance of imagined communities and imagined identity in the understanding the of learners’ investment in language learning. I will turn to discuss the role of language ideology in language learning in the following part.

2.4.3 Language ideology and language learning investment

In order to nurture these identities, one must also consider language ideologies. This is because one’s beliefs about language index a language’s value, how it should be used, and by whom (Darvin & Norton, 2015). The valuing of languages, the establishment of

language policies, and the construction of ethno-linguistic identities are all shaped by language ideology. Some empirical studies have explored the interplay between language ideology and language learners' bilingual investment (Babino & Stewart, 2017; Ballinger, 2017; Thapa; 2019) and multilingual investment (Babino & Stewart, 2019; Bea, 2013, 2014; Massó & De Costa, 2023). For example, Babino and Stewart (2017) adopted the mixed methodology to study 63 fifth-grade students' multilingual investment in the U.S. The findings displayed that although the students were native Spanish speakers and half of their instruction in Spanish at school, they still preferred English both academically and socially. It was because these students believed that English was a privileged language that will bring more success and Spanish was considered an important but secondary language used primarily to talk to people who did not understand English. The research above shows that the language investment choices of learners are affected by the social status of the mainstream language (Ballinger, 2017; Tajeddin et al., 2023).

In a summary, we can see that Norton's investment philosophy has been widely used in language education under different language backgrounds, such as EFL, ESL and ENL. As for the research topics, they usually include the dual/ or multilingual investment, the interplay between learners' language investment and identity constructions, the factors that affect the identity construction and language investment. In terms of the research participants, the concept of investment is used to study the language learning of some special groups such as immigrants, adults, younger students. Moreover, most of the studies adopt the qualitative method to deeply explore learners' language investments

and identity constructions. Even though relevant studies are quite rich, there are still some gaps that need to be addressed. For example, most of them focus on the investment in English as a whole, and more attention are needed to pay on language sub-skills in EFL context such as English pronunciation learning.

Universiti Malaysia

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the belief and investment of selected students in terms of learning English pronunciation and the nature of relationship between their belief and their pronunciation learning investment. This chapter dealt with the research methods and procedures that were used in this study. It included eight sections: (a) the rationale of the study, (b) selection of setting, (c) participants of the study, (d) data collection technique and sources of data, (e) data analysis, (f) data synthesis, (g) trustworthiness and transferability, and (h) conclusion.

3.2 Rationale for Adopting a Qualitative Study

This study used a multiple case study approach within a qualitative interpretive research design. The case study offered insight into the phenomenon being studied, language learner beliefs, and investment, as they exposed real-life situations. Stake (2000) indicated that the case study's goal was to offer a deep awareness about the subject, which may in turn influence practice.

Merriam (1998) claimed that the critical issue in adopting a qualitative method was that the focus of understanding the phenomenon was from the participant's perspective rather than the researcher's perspective. Merriam (1998) often used to explore a situation from the emic perspective rather than the etic perspective. The purpose of qualitative research was to understand the experience of participants in a specific

situation. Learners' beliefs were based on their own life experiences and how these experiences would influence their thoughts and decisions in learning investment. Therefore, their beliefs were best told by learners themselves. Soliciting meaning from a participant was called an emic perspective, reflecting the key concern in a qualitative study (Merriam, 1998).

Furthermore, qualitative researchers aimed to understand the meaning of action to participants, and thus they were closer to the language practice. However, quantitative researchers defined practice problems in their terms, not in terms of practitioners, and tend to generate knowledge that was not immediately understandable to the practitioner (Bolster, 1983). Thus, the qualitative approach met the current study's need, which strives to inform policymakers, administrators, and other relevant stakeholders on English pronunciation learning and teaching.

Case studies were used in this research to explore language learners' beliefs and investment and their complex relationship in the process of English pronunciation learning in and out of the classroom. There were three reasons that why the current study adopted case study. Yin (2009) describes three conditions for a particular method in a study. The first condition was the type of research questions raised. In this study, the research questions were "what" and "how" questions. This study aimed to explore the belief and investment of pronunciation learning and how they were congruent. This type of question was a valid justification for conducting an exploratory case study (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) emphasized the second condition was the degree of control over

behavioral events and the degree of attention to contemporary events. This study was undoubtedly a study of a contemporary event. Aligned with the research questions of the current study, case studies allowed the present study to focus on a particular event, English pronunciation learning of English major in China. Yin (2009) stressed that a case study was a preferred method to study contemporary events when researchers did not want to manipulate participants' behavior. That is to say, and the researcher had little control over the participants. In the current study, the researcher was to interview and observe the participants without any intervention in English pronunciation learning in and out of the classroom. Yin (2009) also added that the unique advantage of a case study was its ability to deal with various types of evidence, mainly interviews, observations, artifacts, and documents. Therefore, this case study that adopted interviews, observation, diaries, documents as its data collection reflected the actual situation in and out of the EFL classroom and obtained the data from the participants themselves.

A multiple case study was an exploration of a “bounded system” of multiple cases over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in a context (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Thus, multiple-case studies involved collecting and analyzing data from two or more cases within the same study. The system was bounded by time and place (p. 61). In the present study, the bounded system was a normal university, and the cases were individual students. Yin (2003) indicated that multiple cases should be selected so that they replicate each other by either predicting similar results or contrasting results for predictive reasons (p. 5). In

current study, as the five participants' previous learning and social experiences were different, exploring how these various experiences had shaped their beliefs and investment was worth exploring. Therefore, a multiple case study was adopted. The findings first presented the individual cases. Then it offered a cross-case analysis suggesting a general explanation about the language learners' beliefs, investment, and complex relationship between them. In summary, through the employment of case study as the research design in the present study, readers can discover new meaning, expand the readers' experience, or confirm the reader's prior understanding.

3.3 Setting

3.3.1 Research Setting

University A is a normal university which is built-in 1946. It is located in Sichuan, China, and is a key provincial normal university. Since the establishment of the university, it has been successfully selected into the National Excellent Talents Education and Training Program and the Sichuan Double First-Class Construction Program, the Excellent Teacher Training Program, and the first batch of publicly funded teacher-student training programs. Moreover, it is a doctoral degree authorized unit determined in the "Tenth Five Year Plan", "Eleventh Five Year Plan", "Twelfth Five Year Plan" and "Thirteenth Five Year Plan" of Sichuan Province. Besides, it is not only the first provincial university to be awarded the "Selection Base for Excellent College Students in Sichuan Province" but also an important basic education teacher training base, in-service teacher training base, basic education, and higher education research base in Sichuan Province. Recent years, it has developed into a comprehensive

university with a complete range of 81 disciplines, excellent educational conditions, 2500 excellent teaching staff, and fruitful teaching and scientific research achievements and 30000 students. General speaking, University A is known as "a good place to study and choose talents".

3.3.2 The School of Foreign Language

The school of foreign languages of University A is one of the earliest units to train foreign language professionals in Southwest China, enjoying the reputation of "cradle of middle school foreign language teachers". The school has four undergraduate programs, namely, English Education, Translation, and Business English, and Japanese. English (normal) major is the key characteristic specialty of the University. Among them, the English major of the school passed the second level certification of Teachers major of the Ministry of Education in 2021. In terms of graduate education, the school has been recruiting graduate students for the professional degree of "Curriculum and Teaching Theory (English Subject Teaching Theory)" since 1999 and began to recruit graduate students for the professional degree of "Subject Teaching (English)" in 2009. In 2021, the school was authorized as a training institution for Master of Translation and Interpreting. In terms of students' graduation, promotion and employment, the graduate examination rate and employment rate of our students are always in the top in the university A.

There are 80 faculty members, including 30 teachers with professor and associate professor title, 20 teachers with doctor degree. Some teachers are doing PhD projects. A lot of teachers have the experiences to study overseas such as in U.S.A., U.K., Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan. Moreover, the school has complete teaching

facilities and perfect educational conditions. The school has more than 10 multimedia language laboratories, 1 simultaneous interpretation training room, 1 Trados translation training room and 1 Business English training room, with a total of more than 600 training booths. It has a reading room for teachers and a reading room for students, with more than 50,000 books and periodicals in Chinese, English, Russian, Japanese, French, and other languages.

The school has long persisted in serving basic education, participating in and guiding the reform of basic education courses, and has a great influence in the field of basic education. The school plays an important role in the national general high school English curriculum reform, primary and secondary school teacher in-service training, high and middle school English teacher classroom teaching demonstration activities, paper selection, college entrance examination English autonomous proposition, college entrance examination paper marking and other important matters. The "National Elementary and Secondary School Foreign Language Teaching Video Case Library" led by the school serves teachers and students in basic foreign language education across the country and contributes to the reform of basic foreign language education in my country.

3.4 Selection of Participants

The participants in the qualitative study was usually tiny. In qualitative research, the most common sampling was purposeful sampling, where the participants were chosen from samples the researcher can learn the most from (Marriam,1998). The first criterion was the difference in their language proficiency levels, which was one of the key factors that made their unique language learning beliefs (Barcelos, 2003; Siebert, 2003; Simon

& Taverniers, 2011; Mercer, 2011; Mori, 1999) and their investment (Norton, 2015). Therefore, the participant of this study consisted of a mixture of advanced level, intermediate level, low level English language learners to maximize the variations between individual students' English pronunciation learning beliefs. These three levels were divided according to their English pronunciation proficiency score in their freshmen year. By categorizing the learners selected into three levels, the study could discover if they show similarities and differences in their cognition and actions on the learning of pronunciation.

The second criterion was differences of academic background. As the learners' learning experiences played an important role in shaping their unique learning beliefs (Barcelos, 2003; Horwitz, 1987), the participants were selected from different academic backgrounds. Hence, the participants of this study consisted of a mixture of English education, English translation, Business English students. The English education student referred to a student who learned the professional knowledge on education besides public courses. The English translation student referred to a student who learned the specific knowledge on translation besides public courses. The student of Business English referred to a student who learned professional knowledge on business besides public courses. The different cases in this study helped to understand the characteristics of English majors' beliefs and investment in English pronunciation learning more comprehensively, while the similarities from different cases helped to promote the results of this study.

The main data were collected between March and early June 2022. Five participants were approached. The five participants who were voluntarily involved in this study were all full-time students. They were chosen on the basis of their availability, convenience, and willingness to get involved in the study. Table 3.1 summarizes the key information about the five learners. A detailed description of their background information will be presented in the succeeding results chapter. All the names used were pseudonyms for confidentiality.

Table 3.2 Summary of background information about the participants

Name	Chen	Lan	Ping	Ma	Xi
Age	19	21	20	21	21
Race	Han	Han	Han	Hui(minority)	Han
Academic background	English education	Business English	English translation	English education	Business English
Grade	1 st year	2 nd Year	2 nd year	2 nd year	2 nd year
Pronunciation proficiency	Advanced level	Low level	intermediate level	Low level	intermediate level

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Interviews

This study explored the English pronunciation learning experience of English major students. Therefore, the most appropriate primary research tool for collecting such data was the interview. According to McCracken (1988), an interview is one of the most powerful methods, which provides researchers with the opportunity to enter another

person's mind and to observe and experience the world as interviewees do themselves. In the context of this study, this was particularly helpful to clarify the "how" and "why" elements of learners' learning phenomenon. To be specific, the interview technique in this study provided an opportunity for participants to fully describe their learning experience, their feelings, perceptions in their own words. Moreover, the interview offered flexibility for the participants to provide an in-depth discussion of their views from their perspectives.

In order to deeply understand the participants belief and their investment in terms of English pronunciation learning, the current study interviewed each participant several times to understand their current and previous English pronunciation learning experiences, particularly life stories of learning English pronunciation in the classroom and outside. At the beginning of the first interview, I asked the interviewees to talk about their educational background, past and present English pronunciation learning experiences, the crucial events or experiences that influenced their English pronunciation learning, and their English pronunciation investment behaviors, the factors that influenced their English pronunciation investment. In the subsequent interview, I focused on the participant recent English pronunciation learning or related experience, feelings, and their perception of their English pronunciation learning. The questions for subsequent interviews came out of issues that emerged during my readings of the transcripts of the previous interviews, of the classroom observation notes, diaries and documents. Each interview with each participant provided questions for subsequent interviews in a cyclical process. Moreover, some questions in the subsequent interview

were different for different subjects since the questions focused on their individual experiences. Therefore, for each interview, I prepared an interview outline for each participant.

During the interview, I asked the participant to express their views as much as possible, especially when their views were different from last time. Therefore, during the interviews, I remained quiet and attentive to what learners had to say. Probing techniques was used if I wanted learners to elaborate on what they said. For example, “Could you give me some examples of what you said?”, “Can you be more specific?”, and “What do you mean?”. Clarification techniques will also be used to ensure that I understand the message accurately. For example, “Do you mean...?” and “Is...what you meant?”

The data from the interview was used to answer three research questions, “what are the beliefs of English major students in China regarding their English pronunciation learning?”, “How do English major students in China invest in their English pronunciation learning?”, “How are English major students' pronunciation learning beliefs congruent with their investment in learning English pronunciation?”. All the interviews were conducted in Chinese. The core interview questions were translated into English and can be found in Appendix B.

3.5.2 Classroom observations

In qualitative research, observation was a powerful means to provide rich

phenomenological data. As Merriam (1998) pointed out, observations usually take place in the natural setting and therefore represents first-hand encounter with the phenomenon of interest. According to Patton (1990), the purpose of observation was to “describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspective of those observed” (p. 202). To gain a deeper understanding of participants’ process in their English pronunciation learning, I observed their investment in the classroom.

Observations were conducted in their classrooms according to participants’ recommendation. The purpose was to obtain data on the learners' overt behaviors and investment in the classroom rather than relied solely on their reported investment to get a more comprehensive and complete picture of the learners' investment. The data gathered from the class observations were used to supplement the data collected from their interviews and to answer question two and question three. During the observations, a self-designed observation task sheet was used to keep track of every behavior of the learners (see Appendix C). The observations was either be audio or video-recorded depending on the teachers' and students' preferences.

The field notes was taken during the observation period. According to Merriam (1998) it should include the following three parts: (1) verbal description of the setting, people, and activities, (2) direct quotations or the substance of what people said, and (3) observer's comments (p. 106). Therefore, my field notes focused on four topics: (1) the

physical setting in which the participant learning English pronunciation (e.g., what are on their desks), (2) the participant's learning behavior (e.g., whether he / she learns independently or cooperatively with classmates), (3) the participants utterances (e.g., what do they say in the process of learning), (4) participants' body language and facial expressions in the process of English pronunciation learning (5) my response to the setting, participants' body language and facial expressions, the utterances and behaviors of participants. I used an observation form (Appendix C) to help me systematically take field notes. To sum up, in the observation process, I paid close attention to these specific areas and took field notes as detailed as possible.

3.5.3 Stimulated recall interview

The stimulated recall was utilized to “seek to uncover cognitive processes that are not evident through simple observation” (Gass & Mackey, 2006, p. 20). In this case, they were used to get data on the learners' beliefs that underpinned the learning behaviors in the classroom. The videotapes or audiotapes, class documents (e.g., handouts, worksheets), and class observation notes were used to help learners recall and verbalize their thought processes at the time of the original classroom activity. The stimulated recall interview was conducted after each observation, and it was conducted in Chinese.

Gass and Mackey (2006) claimed the chances of accurate reporting were greater when the time between the event reported, and the reporting itself was short. In light of this, the stimulated recalls were conducted soon after the classroom observations while the lessons were still fresh in the learners' minds. The researcher watched/ or listened to the

video/ or audio clips beforehand and preselected the relevant parts that the researcher wanted to explore further. When it came to the actual recall, standardized stimulated recall procedures were followed. Firstly, the learners were given instructions in Chinese about what they were expected to do (See appendix D for the English version). Then, a brief description of the class observations was given to refresh their memory. After that, the preselected video/ or audio clips was played and paused for the learners to comment on their experience and what was going on and to elaborate on their beliefs and choice of learning investment involving the observed behaviors. While watching/ or listening to the videotape/ or cassette, the participants were also given a chance to pause the video/ or audio clips at any time if they wished to comment on any thoughts about their English pronunciation learning and English pronunciation learning behaviors at the time. General open-ended questions were asked (see appendix E for the questions). The purpose was to help the learners provide recall comments without leading them. These recall sessions were audio taped with their permission. The data were incorporated into the data analysis and used to answer question two about their choices of learning investment and question three about the relationships between learner beliefs and learning investment.

3.5.4 Documents Collection

Documents were another useful measure in qualitative research, in addition to direct observations and interviews. According to Merriam (1998), documents referred to a broad range of “written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand” (p. 112). Documents were unobtrusive so that they can provide more accurate insights into

the inquiry in qualitative research (Berg, 2001). In the current study, documents such as course syllabus, handouts, lesson notes, and other potentially useful documents were collected with their permission. Hence, the researcher requested for those relevant documents during each visit to the participants' school. The course syllabus provided me with an overview of what were taught and students' weekly assignments. At the same time, it guided me to mentally plan what I should prepare and do every week to collect data smoothly. The handouts and materials used in the class allow me to remember the content of the class, the nature of the tasks and activities done in the class, and how students used the handouts and materials to complete the tasks. In a word, the data gathered from the documents were used to supplement the data collected from interviews.

3.5.5 Diary

Diaries are designed to capture the “little experiences of everyday life that fill most of our working time and occupy the vast majority of our conscious attention” (Wheeler & Reis, 1991, p. 340). A fundamental benefit of diary methods is that they permit the examination of reported events and experiences in their natural, spontaneous context, providing information complementary to that obtainable by more traditional designs (Reis, 1994). In the current study, the learners were asked to keep a diary of their English pronunciation learning investment behaviors in and out of classroom, their thoughts about anything that they considered to have an effect on their English pronunciation investment in and out of the classroom. The purpose was to gain some

insight into the learners' perspectives about their English pronunciation learning investment experiences. They were issued with an exercise book and a set of guidelines (see Appendix F for the English version) about keeping their diaries and what to look out for. They were assured of complete confidentiality for their diaries. The learners were allowed to write the diary entries in their own language, i.e., Mandarin. The learners were asked to enter one or two diary entries per week. The obtained data on the learners' diaries to answer research question two: "How do English major students in China invest in their English pronunciation learning?" and research question three "How are English major students' pronunciation learning beliefs congruent with their investment in learning English pronunciation?" In a word, the data gathered from the diaries were used to supplement the data collected from interviews.

Table 3.1 Summary of Data Collection

Research questions	Data Collection Method	Analysis Method
1.What are the beliefs of English major students in China regarding their English pronunciation learning?	Interview	Inductive Analysis
	Classroom observation	
	Stimulated-recall interview	
	Diary	
	Document	
2.How do English major students in China invest in their English pronunciation learning?	Interview	Inductive Analysis
	Classroom observation	
	Stimulated-recall interview	
	Diary	
	Document	
3.How are English major students' pronunciation learning beliefs congruent with their investment in learning English	Interview	Inductive Analysis
	Classroom observation	
	Stimulated-recall interview	

3.6 Data Analysis

This section would discuss how researchers analyzed the data collected from all five main sources and the methods used in the analysis. Data collection and analysis was conducted simultaneously during the study period in the qualitative study. Mackey and Grass (2006) believed that researchers usually use cyclical data analysis when analyzing qualitative data. In this study, seven analysis stages by Marshall and Rossman (2006) were selected to guide the analysis of this study: 1) organizing the data, 2) immersing in the data, 3) generating categories and themes, 4) coding the data, 5) offering interpretations, 6) searching alternative understandings, and 7) writing the findings.

3.6.1 Organizing the Data

In qualitative data analysis, organizing the data is the most essential key stage as Huberman and Miles (1994) assert, “how data are stored and retrieved is the heart of data management...”. Moreover, Berg (2007) proposed that for researchers, it is important to have systematic and functional data storage and retrieval methods. This allows the researcher to fully understand all the collected data, easily retrieve the data, and ensure efficient data analysis and records. In this study, the data consists of: 1) interviews transcripts, 2) classroom observations fieldnotes 3) stimulated recall interviews transcripts, 4) Documents, 5) Diaries.

The process of transcribing the interview data was done immediately after each interview. To ensure that the researcher was completely immersed in the data, all transcriptions were done by the researchers. Then, the researchers listened to all the interviews, compared them with the interview transcripts and the notes taken during the interview, and then made necessary revisions to the transcriptions. For the fieldnotes from observations, the researcher immediately listened to the recorded audio or watched video after each observation. The audio/video was compared with the field notes from the observation and the researcher made necessary revision in the field notes. Then, the transcriptions and fieldnotes were sent to the participants to ensure accuracy and transparency. Then, amendments were made based on the feedback given by the participants. The researcher created one file for each participant and store all the interview transcripts, observation field notes, documents, and diaries. Each file was named accordingly.

3.6.2 Generating Categories, Themes, and Patterns

In this study, inductive data analysis (Mackey & Grass, 2006) was used to generate categories, topics, and patterns. The inductive data analysis approach allowed the emergence of research findings based on the themes that are recurrent, prevailing, and noteworthy within the raw data. Mackey and Grass (2006) believed that researchers' postulation and understanding were crucial to shaping the outline of qualitative analysis. In generating categories, themes, and patterns from the raw data, including interview transcripts, observation field notes, stimulated recall interview transcripts, documents and diaries were first examined repeatedly until the researcher can identify the evidence

that provided the answers to the research questions.

In identifying the evidence that could answer the research questions, the researcher paid specific attention to information on learners' learning beliefs, learners learning investment, and factors influencing that result in the congruence or incongruence between their belief and investment. Hence, based on the patterns shown by the raw data, the researcher managed to form categories out of the evidence from the raw data. After immersing intensely in the data by continuously rereading each of the interview transcripts, stimulated recall interview transcripts, observation field notes, documents, and diaries, the researcher managed to identify several tentative themes for each category before coding the data.

3.6.3 Coding the Data

In the process of data coding, the researcher focused on the learners' English pronunciation learning beliefs, learners' English learning investment behaviors, and factors influencing their investment behaviors and beliefs that affected the relationship between belief and investment by referring to the identified tentative themes. To find the answers for each research question, each interview transcript, stimulated recall interview transcript, observation fieldnote, and learners' diaries and documents were carefully scrutinized then were processed and analysed via Nvivo by designation of different codes. In order to ensure the transparency of the analysis, the coding process was carried out three times, with an interval of one week. Then, the researcher compared the three sets of coding and make necessary revisions. Since some of the

themes overlapped each other, the researcher finalized the themes.

Since the present study adopted a multiple case studies approach, it involved collecting and analyzing data from several cases. There were two stages of analysis in this study: the within-case analysis and the cross-case analysis. In within-case analysis, each case was treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself. Then, data were gathered, which allowed the researcher to find out about the contextual variables that might have a bearing on the case. The cross-case analysis began once the analysis of each case was completed. According to Merriam (2009), a qualitative multiple case study aimed to build abstraction across cases. Therefore, the researcher attempted to build a general explanation that represented the individual cases in the cross-case analysis.

3.7 Data synthesis

Synthesis referred to put the categories resulting from the coding process together to reconstruct a holistic and integrated explanation. To synthesize the data, the researcher identified some major patterns or themes that were linked together, either similarly or differently, that collectively described or analyze the English major students' learning experience. Then, within categories, patterns were compared and contrasted and this was followed by patterns across categories. Finally, the researcher situated the findings with respect to prior research on English pronunciation learning, and compared and contrasted them with issues that had been discussed in the broader literature on English pronunciation learning belief and investment. With the completion of the analysis and

synthesis, the researcher formulated a conclusion and developed various implications to the body of knowledge, theory, practice in English pronunciation learning of English major students in China and future research.

3.8 Trustworthiness and Transferability

Trustworthiness (Merriam, 1998) supplies qualitative research with a reconceptualization of the notion of validity and reliability. The validity and reliability of the study is ensured by triangulation. There are four types of triangulation described by Denzin (1978): (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation. This study used data triangulation to obtain multiple data sources through different data acquisition techniques, such as interviews, classroom observation, stimulated recall interviews, diaries and documents. By using this strategy, researchers can test a source of information or data against another to discover and discard any inconsistencies in the interpretation of the findings. In this study, the beliefs expressed by the participants were confirmed through stimulated-recall interview after each observation, classroom observation, diary and documents. And the investment expressed by the participants were validated by classroom observations by researcher, stimulated-recall interview after each observation as well as diaries written by participants. At the same time the congruence between learners' beliefs and investments expressed by participants was also justified by observation, stimulated recall interviews, diary.

Additionally, prolonged engagement and persistent observation can ensure trustworthiness. Prolong engagement was maintained by the researcher's frequent visits to the participants' setting during the data collection period. It also involved long-term interactions with participants. Thus, the data collection included a series of interviews, observations, documents and diaries within a semester or until data saturation. In addition to assisting in the triangulation of data, it also guided and promoted a comprehensive familiarity with the research setting by creating an atmosphere of comfort and trust.

Furthermore, member check was used to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. A member check was conducted in order to ensure accurate records of participants' experiences and belief statements. In this study, member check was a regular part of the interview process because the researcher spent enough time on conducting follow-up interviews, asking participants to confirm, comment, or correct the researcher's interpretations of their words from previous interviews or even from earlier in the same interview. At the same time, all participants received the reports of their statements in their interviews and were allowed to clarify, modify, and affirm whatever that had been said to the researcher. This strategy allowed the researcher to make sure the findings were free from her biases and misunderstandings.

Transferability (Merriam, 1998) provides a reconceptualization of the notion of generalizability for qualitative research by allowing qualitative research findings to resonate with other backgrounds. This study provided transferability through detailed

and thick descriptions of the participants, settings, and findings, hoping that readers can find similar experiences and transfer the findings to their contexts. At the same time, these strategies enabled the research to be replicated and provided consistency.

3.9 Preliminary data collection

3.9.1 Gaining entry to the site

In 2013, I did my master's degree in the field of TESOL in the university A. Therefore, I contacted the teacher who once taught me and told him I wanted to collect data in this university in July 2021. He expressed great interest in my study and told me to wait for responses because he needed to negotiate with the dean of the foreign language school in the university A. Because of the covid-19, I stayed for nearly one month and finally, the teacher told me that the university admitted me to enter the university in September 2021.

When I entered the university, and I contacted the dean of the foreign language school again. As I wanted to explore the beliefs and investment of English major students, the dean asked to contact the teachers who would teach them. He thought it was easier for me to choose the participants. Then I spent about one week contacting the teacher who would teach English pronunciation and English listening and speaking. The teachers who taught the two types of courses welcomed me to enter their classes. Then I introduced myself and my research to the students. At the same time, I provided questionnaires for the students, which helped me choose the participants and get brief

backgrounds the them.

3.9.2 Participants

Around two weeks, two students were interested in my study and were willing to join my study. I gave them the pseudonyms Jennis and Lily. According to my observation in their performance in the classroom and their self-evaluation of English pronunciation learning, Jennis was an advanced English pronunciation learner, and Lily was also poor English pronunciation learner. I told them that I got consent from the dean of the foreign language school, and all the information they shared with me would be confidential.

3.9.3 Data collection

Five sources of data collection were used: two times interviews, two times classroom observations, and two times stimulated recall interviews, onediaries and documents.

The participants' interviews took about 1 hour each. They were interviewed individually besides a lake in the university. The interviews were recorded with their permission, and no notes were taken during the interviews to make the participants feel comfortable. Jennis and Lily received a copy of the transcribed interview so that they could check it. Jennis and Lily agreed with the transcripts and didn't change anything.

I observed two types of classes. One is an English pronunciation course once, and the other is a listening and speaking course once. I carried out video-recorded with consent from teachers and students during observation. I tried to be open and took field notes

about what happened in the class. After the observation, I went back home to watch the video again to check the field notes taken in the classroom and made some adjustments when inconsistencies founded.

Then I negotiated with participants to do the stimulated recall interview for each observation when they were available within a week. Jennis and Lily were quite cooperative, and they were willing to answer the questions I asked them. At the same time, they were positively to add their ideas to address something unclear.

In terms of diary, the university was closed because the covid-19. Therefore, Jennis took photos and shared her diaries with me through the WeChat app. However, Lily told me that she was unclear the definition of investment so that she didn't write anything.

Last but not the least, I kept on collecting the documents such as their teaching and learning materials, assignments, notes taken during classroom, anything related with their English pronunciation learning.

3.9.4 Proposed change

The preliminary study recommended retaining the following research tools as they proved effective and useful: questionnaire, interviews, classroom observations, and stimulated recall interviews, documents. The following changes were made:

- (1) Some questions were added to the core interview questions which tapped into

learners' beliefs about the focus of English pronunciation learning, e.g., "which do you focus more, accuracy or fluency?" At the same time, in order to make participants easier to answer questions in terms of their beliefs about the status of English pronunciation learning, I changed the questions "How do you compare English pronunciation learning with other English skills learning, such as listening, speaking, writing, reading, grammar, vocabulary?" to "what are your attitude towards English pronunciation learning comparing with other English skills, such as listening, speaking, writing, reading, grammar, vocabulary?" and "Do you think learning English pronunciation is different from learning other English skills? how?" Besides, I deleted some questions in terms of learners' beliefs about their own aptitude of English pronunciation learning, "Do you think it is easy for you to form associations between these sounds and the symbols representing them? For example, 1. Kloza (A. attire B. nearby C. stick D. giant E. relatives); Do you think you can accurately memorize the above association in a short time?"

(2) Although class observations were useful, some issues arose due to the limited classroom activities. Some teachers gave more time for the students to participate while other teachers dominated the class and left little time for the students. Even the same teacher varied from one observation to another with regard to the class activities depending on the teaching contents. To make the take advantage of the observations I decided to consult the teachers earlier to ensure the time for the observations was appropriate in terms of the teaching contents and class activities.

(3) Although the diary was helpful for collecting the participants' investment data out of the classroom, participants were still unclear enough about how to write in terms of "How do you feel in the process of investing in English pronunciation learning?" and "Are anything influencing your investment?" They told me they felt difficult to understand the term "investment" so that participant's diary writings didn't mention any social-cultural factors that influence your investment. Therefore, I gave them more clues to help their diary writing. For example, I added, "Please describe the activities that you take part in English pronunciation learning" "Why do you choose these activities that help your English pronunciation learning?" "What do you gain from this English pronunciation learning activities?" "What are factors that promote or hinder your English pronunciation learning?"

3.10 Data collection of Main Study

In the main study, based on the revised questionnaires, classroom observation schedule and new diary writing clues, another five participants were invited to the current study. The whole data collection was held from March to early June 2022. The same site, data collection methods and same data collection procedures as the preliminary studies were followed.

3.11 Summary

The chapter deals with the methodology and tools applied in the study in order to provide answers for the three research questions dealing with the learners' belief, their

investment in English pronunciation learning, and the relationship between their belief and investment in English pronunciation learning. Chapter four will discuss the findings on the study thoroughly.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This section presents the findings and the analysis of the data. The purpose of this study is to explore the beliefs of selected learners on the learning of pronunciation and the nature of the relationship between their beliefs and their pronunciation learning investment. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the beliefs of English major students in China regarding their English pronunciation learning?
2. How do English major students in China invest in their English pronunciation learning?
3. How are English major students' pronunciation learning beliefs congruent with their investment in learning English pronunciation?

The first part of this section describes the within-case analysis. For the second part of the section, the findings of the cross-case analysis are presented. Subsequently, the last part of the chapter concludes the whole findings of the study.

4.2 The Within-Case Analysis

The findings of the within-case analysis are divided into three parts. All five students from the same university volunteered to be participants in this study. The following discusses the first case, Chen in terms of her beliefs, her investment and the congruence between her beliefs and investment in English Pronunciation learning.

4.2.1 Case Chen

The first participant Chen was recommended by her classmate in September 2021. When met for the first time on campus, Chen was wearing heavy elaborate make-up. Her big eyes were very attractive with the barest hint of a smile. After being told of the research intention, she expressed great interest in it and showed her willingness to share her English pronunciation learning story. However, she mentioned that she had just joined a singing and dancing club, and had also signed up for Japanese extracurricular classes which would take up some of her spare time. After discussing with her, a negotiated schedule of interviews and observations was agreed between Chen and the researcher.

Chen suggested that the two classes she was attending, the English Listening and Speaking class and the Spoken English class would be ideal for her to be observed since she sometimes picks up English pronunciation knowledge from these classes. In the end, Chen was observed three times in these two classes. At the end of the study, a total of four formal interviews, five classroom observations, two classroom stimulus recall interviews were conducted, and 28 of her diaries were read to gain detailed information

about her English phonetics learning experience.

Chen was born in Guiyang City, Guizhou Province, southwestern China. She was 19 years old and grew up in a family with one parent. She lives with her mother who like most normal Chinese parents worry that their children would lag behind other children of the same age. Hence, Chen has already been sent to different tutoring centers by her mother, such as '*CC English*' and '*Susan English*' to learn English since she was in primary three. These off-campus training institutions not only cultivated her strong interest in learning English but also showed her talent for learning English. Therefore, she chose English as her major at the university, with excellent grades on China's college entrance examination.

Due to her strong self-discipline, Chen quickly adapted to college life. In class, she took the initiative to raise her hands to express her insights with fluent English. After class, she never missed any opportunity to actively participate in cultural exchange activities between China and foreign countries. She also did several English dubbing activities in the school. To her classmates and teachers, Chen was an advanced English learner who was very self-disciplined and highly ambitious to attain her goals.

4.2.2 Chen's Belief

4.2.2.1 English Pronunciation Learning Goal Belief

Native-likeness

Chen recalled that teaching and learning activities in classroom from primary school to

university, most of the audio, videos, and test materials adopted by English teachers were in General American English pronunciation. Moreover, during the several years she studied at the training institutions out of school, the teacher also asked her to read and recite along with audio to imitate the General American English pronunciation. Due to the long-term, and subtle influence, she took it for granted that General American English pronunciation was the standard and model for her learning.

“Interviewer: What English accents have you been exposed to the most?

Chen: What we are exposed to most in class is General American English pronunciation. It is no exaggeration to say that the learning materials we use are almost General American. I remember when I was in the training institutions, the pronunciation that I learned and imitated the most was General American. Therefore, it will naturally be regarded as a learning standard.”

(CIT1-800-804)

In addition to her learning experiences in formal schools and training institutions, her exposure to a large number of European and American film and television works in her free time, also increased her yearning for General American English pronunciation. Unlike other participants who did not appreciate English culture, Chen was curious and interested in European and American culture, so she spent her spare time watching European and American dramas and movies, listening to and singing English songs, and dubbing English short videos. In the process, she found General American English pronunciation approachable, inspiring, freedom, and powerful compared to other accents, such as depressed and rigid Received Pronunciation (RP).

“Interviewer: What do you think of General American English pronunciation?

Chen: General American sounds slightly freer. It sounds casual and free, giving

people a sense of intimacy and less seriousness. I think the Received Pronunciation, to be honest, feels a little bit. Anyway, I think Received Pronunciation is more stereotypical compared to General American.”

(CIT1-1307-1320)

Ever since she was a child, Chen has set higher standards for herself than her peers, demanding perfection in everything and not tolerating any flaws. Her perfectionist personality drove her to pursue and perfect the General American English pronunciation. For example, although she can tolerate other people's accented English, she will never allow herself to converse in Chinglish (a slang for spoken English influenced by the Chinese) as this would make her feel uncomfortable. This perfection-seeking personality prompted her to persistently imitate General American English pronunciation, which made her pronunciation sound more pleasant compared with her peers and receive much praise from her teachers.

“Interviewer: Why were you unwilling to accept accented English but still so obsessed with pursuing General American English pronunciation?

Chen: This may be related to my personality. I'm a perfectionist. I always have higher requirements and standards than my classmates. General American English pronunciation is the best, so I will work hard to achieve this. I can't tolerate with an accent.”

(CIT3-261-264)

This idea that she preferred the General American English pronunciation and wanted to achieve it was also noted in her diary.

“Recently, I saw a video produced by an American blogger. This is about whether Americans mind foreigners with accents when they speak English. The blogger stated that although Americans do not mock in person, they still mind. Therefore,

I believe that in order to communicate better and leave a good impression on others, the closer the standards are, the better. In addition, American pronunciation itself is also quite good.”

(CD-29-33-June-11)

Generally speaking, influenced by her previous and current formal and informal English learning experiences and her personality, Chen liked to treat General American (GA) English as a standard to pursue.

4.2.2.2 English Pronunciation Learning Importance Belief

Imagined community

In Norton's (2013) view, imagined communities refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination. By 'tangible' and 'accessible', Norton refers to diverse communities such as neighborhoods, workplaces, educational sites, and religious groups, etc., whose existence is concrete and current, and by 'not immediately' so, she meant the same communities but in near or distant future and which we imagine we would be affiliated with one day.

For Chen, her imagined community would be the American way of life. Since the third grade of primary school, Chen has begun to be exposed to European and American culture through watching a large number of European and American movies and listening to English songs on the internet. Influenced by this multimedia, she developed a great longing for American culture and society. In her view, American society is free and open, where people dare to express their opinions, respect different ideas, and

promote equality between men and women. Moreover, their learning atmosphere is autonomous and positive, just like in the documentary about *Gu Aileen's* learning and life on American campuses. However, in China, things are very different. Chen commented that people are more reserved among themselves and emphasized that it is good that women are not educated. In addition, education in China strictly follows rules and regulations, and students often passively accept arrangements, lacking opportunities to actively express their opinions and viewpoints.

Therefore, the stark differences between Chinese and American cultures made her dream of studying in the United States and experiencing the free and open American culture, because her outgoing and straightforward personality was incompatible with Chinese culture. Therefore, to better integrate into American society in the future, Chen believed that standard English pronunciation is essential.

“Interviewer: Could you tell me what kind of community you yearn for?”

Chen: I watched a lot of American movies and documentaries. I feel that they are unrestrained, and their learning atmosphere is more relaxed than ours in China, and students' autonomous learning ability is also relatively good. Our teaching and learning styles are more routine and step-by-step, which makes me feel depressed sometimes. I am an outgoing person who likes to show myself. Hence, I really hope that one day I can go to the United States to experience their free and easy-going culture. In order to better integrate, I think that good English pronunciation is a prerequisite.”

(CIT3-548-556)

Imagined identity

Learners' imagined identities - a desired sense of self that learners project for themselves in the future (Norton, 2001) - would simultaneously be formed and developed along the construction of their imagined communities. Chen had a wide

range of hobbies and hoped to become a multi-talented celebrity. Since primary school, Chen has watched a lot of English movies and TikTok short videos, sang a lot of English songs, and used the fun dubbing software to dub short videos. These activities not only catalyzed her dreams of becoming an English singer, an English blogger and a English dubbing actress, she also realized that pronunciation was the soul that shaped all kinds of characters. For example, Chen shared that she would like to be an English singer like *Taylor Swift* who encourages her fans to be positive people with authentic American English as well as a lively and interesting English blogger like *Ma Siri* and *Cardi B* who shares cultural differences between Chinese and Western in English. Therefore, Chen said that if she wanted to realize these imagined identities living in the spotlight, standard English pronunciation was the cornerstone.

“Interviewer: Have you thought about what you want to do in the future?

Chen: I imagine that if I became famous in the future, I would go abroad to communicate with my fans.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Chen: I want to be a famous singer like *Taylor Swift*.

Interviewer: Can you describe it in detail?

Chen: I want to do some international music. The music style tends towards Western style. If my fans are from abroad, I want to communicate with them in English. If my English pronunciation is not good enough, it will embarrass me and my fans may think that I disrespect them. I think standard English pronunciation is more conducive to communicating with them, which makes them feel that I love them very much.

Interviewer: Besides being an English singer, do you have any other plans?

Chen: English blogger like *Cardi B* or English voice actor. I often do some interesting dubbing exercises and imitate kinds of characters. I often think about what intonation and tone I should use to portray a character in different contexts best.”

(CIT2-557-578)

Except for being a multi-imagined celebrity, Chen also planned to be an ordinary

English university teacher. She was an excellent girl who was outstanding among her classmates. When she shared her imagined identity as a multi-talented celebrity with her classmates and friends, she didn't get much support. They even thought that she was being unrealistic and impractical. Chen, having second thoughts, began to realize that the road to achieving her imagined identity as a multi-talented celebrity would be difficult. Thus, Chen reflected that if her imagined identity were shattered, she would consider to be an ordinary English university teacher in her country. Chen described that she was likely to be an outstanding teacher who is humorous, practical, and knowledgeable, with good spoken English to bring positive influence on her students and make them feel the charm of English culture. The following interview excerpt illustrates this change of heart;

“Chen: Maybe I can be an ordinary English teacher.

Interviewer: How does this idea come from?

Chen: If I can't realize my dreams of becoming an English singer, voice actor, or blogger in the future, I think it's okay to be an ordinary English teacher. I also imagined this scene. If I speak English well, I may influence my students' pronunciation. I want to help them learn English well. Moreover, if some students appreciate American culture like me, they may become interested in English culture through my spoken English, which is quite nice.”

(CIT2-623-641)

Social capital

Social capital refers to connections to networks of power (Bourdieu, 1986), which includes amicable relationships with peers and teachers as well as access to quality learning environments, either at school or home, that facilitate learning (Park, 2019).

Chen acknowledged that English pronunciation could not only help her realize her

imagined identity but also broaden her social capital. She admitted that she was dissatisfied with her current circle of friends as they were too lazy to improve their English skills. She hoped that with good pronunciation, she would be able to integrate into a better circle of friends and be acquainted with her favorite stars like *Jackson Wang*, *Deng Ziqi*, and *Taylor Swift*. Chen also hoped that by being in their company, she would gain more performance experience, singing skills and multicultural knowledge.

“Chen: I enjoy making friends. If I speak English well, I wish I could make friends with my idols.

Interviewer: Who are your idols?

Chen: For example, *Taylor Swift*, *Deng Ziqi*, *Ma Si Rui* etc. I think they are very interesting and versatile so that I can learn some English singing skills and multicultural knowledge from them. Unlike some girls who gossip and haggle, I don't like them at all.

Interviewer: What does it have to do with pronunciation learning?

Chen: If you want to get into these high-quality friend circles, good English pronunciation is necessary. Otherwise, there is no way to effectively communicate with them.”

(CIT3-257-268)

Cultural capital

Cultural capital (Bourdieu,1986) refers to knowledge, educational credentials, and appreciation of specific cultural forms. In Chen's case, she believed that improving her English pronunciation is a good way to strengthen her communication skills and help her get good listening scores in written tests. As she is from the city, Chen had access to more English learning resources compared to her peers who come from rural areas of the country. Since her primary school days, Chen had the opportunity to study English in extracurricular training institutions like '*CC English*' and '*Susan English*' where the

teachers paid more attention to English phonetic knowledge aiming to improve learners' English communicative ability.

"Interviewer: How did you learn English pronunciation in the English training institutions?

Chen: I remembered that my mother sent me to '*CC English*' and '*Susan English*'. Training institutions paid more attention to communication skills. The teachers were very responsible. In order to improve our oral expression skills, they spent time on explaining phonetic knowledge."

(CIT1-890-894)

During the interview on her experience at '*CC English*' in junior high school, Chen recalled having three foreign English teachers who took turns in giving students English oral lessons each week, and carrying out different kinds of interactive activities to practice their spoken English. The most memorable one for her was the discussion activity. When they finished the discussion, the foreign teachers would give comments based on their performance. Chen remembered an occasion where she was praised by the foreign teacher for her standard pronunciation. However, the pronunciation of another student was questioned by the foreign teacher, saying that it was difficult to understand. Inspired by two entirely distinct comments from her foreign teacher, Chen realized the significance of English pronunciation for efficient and effective communication.

"Interviewer: Did you have more to add?

Chen: The most commonly used activity was the topic discussion by the foreign teacher in the '*CC English*' institution.

Interviewer: How?

Chen: The foreign teacher would like to listen to our discussion. Then he observed our opinions and pronunciation as well as gave comments. Once, he said he could

understand my English pronunciation but felt difficult to understand my partner.

Interviewer: How did you feel at that time?

Chen: I wanted to learn English pronunciation well. I thought that good English pronunciation was useful for communication.”

(CIT1-1266-1280)

Apart from the extra learning classes, Chen was fortunate to be given the opportunity to travel to the places where English was commonly used in daily life. As a ballet dancer with level 8 of the amateur group, Chen went on a performing tour with dance companies in Hong Kong and Macao, China. During her travel, she observed many foreigners who spoke English in their daily lives. She admitted being envious of their standard pronunciation and seized the opportunity to converse with them. The experience further compounded her belief that English was more about effective oral communication than just passing well in written examinations.

"Interviewer: How did you feel about touring in Macao and Hong Kong?

Chen: Many foreigners spoke English. I thought their pronunciation was perfect. Their pronunciation was standard, worthy of being native. I demanded even more of myself. I felt very impressed that English was not just about written-exams but also about oral communication."

(CIT1-1139-1142)

In addition to understanding the role of English pronunciation in improving communicative skills, as an English major, Chen cherished the importance of English pronunciation in the written exams, especially the listening scores. She recalled that, as she had good enough English phonetic knowledge, her English listening scores in junior and senior high school were always full marks. Otherwise, it would be impossible for her to be at the top of the class in English. Besides, Chen added that even in college,

English education in China is still centered on written examinations. If she hoped to successfully pass the TEM-4 and TEM-8 with excellent results, English pronunciation was an essential element.

"Interviewer: What do you think of the role of English pronunciation in examination?

Chen: I think good pronunciation will help me achieve high scores on the listening tests. My English listening scores were always perfect during my junior and senior high school years. Now in the university, English pronunciation also played a crucial role in passing TEM-4 and TEM-8."

(CIT3-565-571)

To sum up, based on her formal school learning experience and informal English activities like dubbing, singing, and travel experiences, Chen believed that English pronunciation plays an important role in communication, examinations, realizing one's imagined identity, integrating into imagined communities, and making friends with outstanding people.

4.2.2.3 English Pronunciation Learning Strategy Belief

Cognitive strategy

Dörnyei (2005) argued that cognitive strategies involve manipulating or transforming the learning materials or inputs (e.g., imitation, summarizing, using images). In her long-term English learning, Chen found herself an auditory learner who was good at learning by listening and speaking. Hence, imitation was the most preferred method for her to learn English pronunciation. She said that during her formal schooling days, English pronunciation was marginalized in classroom activities compared with other English learning skills. In most cases, Chen had to rely on herself to acquire English

pronunciation from popular social media apps like TikTok, online talk forums like Ted Talks, Bilibili, the Chinese version of YouTube, or some related audio and videos such as singing English songs, doing shadow reading, and doing English dubbing. The following paragraph details the description of the specific imitation strategies.

When Chen was in junior high school, she was influenced by her English class representative who had a strong interest in European and American music. Chen then started to listen to English songs by some Western singers like *Ariana Grande*, *Katy Perry*, *Avril Lavigne*, *Rihanna*, *Michael Jackson*, *Adele*, and *Sia*. She admired their unique musical style and dreamed of being an English singer herself. Thus, Chen started to spend her spare time learning many English songs as she felt that singing these songs not only helped her express her emotions and feelings, but also helped her master some articulation manners and places such as the thoracic cavity, nasal cavity, head cavity, and oral cavity and increased her English phonetic knowledge like phonetic symbols, consonant clusters, linking, omission, stress, and intonation. In short, Chen believed that singing English songs was a helpful way to improve her English pronunciation proficiency, as stated during her interview as follows:

“Singing songs helped me feel the authentic English.”

(CIT1-382)

She also wrote something similar in her diary as expressed below:

“Singing is more significant than speaking”.

(CD-52-53-April-14)

In addition, Chen liked to perform English dubbing exercise as this was one of her favorite ways to imitate English pronunciation. The English dubbing software was a learning tool that her junior high school English teacher shared with them. Since then, Chen has been practicing dubbing and has completed dubbing for nearly 200 short videos. She shared some dubbing videos with her teachers and classmates, and received positive recognition and encouragement, which boosted her confidence. In her view, dubbing was not just a simple imitation, but also a physical and mental investment. To perfectly present the personality and emotions of each character, she usually imitated each short video word for word more than 10 times. Although this was a boring and painful process, it was in this repeated imitation that she mastered pronunciation knowledge such as liaison, strong form, elision, and intonation.

"Interviewer: Besides singing, do you have any other favorite ways of imitating?"

Chen: English dubbing. I think it's my favorite way to imitate. Because it is a short video, it has a storyline. Each character's pronunciation and intonation are different. I have to imitate over and over again, only then can I accurately express the character's personality and emotions. Although it is boring to repeat, I feel satisfied when I finish one clip. In the process of dubbing, I can gain some English phonetics knowledge unconsciously."

(CIT2-352-355)

Apart from imitation, Chen also believed that participation in practical English phonetic courses, such as taking advantage of resources on the internet, was a good way to learn English pronunciation. When faced with difficulties during the process of listening and speaking activities mentioned earlier, she was inclined to seek help from other network resources like WeChat account named *TeacherGwen* and *Bilibili*. Chen found that she

was able to get detailed phonetic knowledge instructions to help her get through the difficulties related to the English pronunciation. The following narration illustrates the strategies Chen used on the internet:

“Interviewer: Can you specifically explain how to use network resources to learn English pronunciation?

Chen: The one I often use is *TeacherGwen*. The teacher would give some pronunciation tips in her video, and I would go and learn by myself. The teacher likes to use different symbols to represent different phonetic knowledge. For example, the weak or strong forms, punctuation, and sense groups would all be marked with different colors in the sentences. Then she would give a detailed analysis and demonstrate it herself. I read after her, which I think is helpful for overcoming English phonetic difficulties.”

(CIT4-43-48)

Social Strategies

Dörnyei (2005) agreed that social strategies involve interpersonal behaviors aimed at increasing the amount of second language (L2) communication and practice the learner undertakes (e.g. initiating with native speakers, and cooperating with peers). In the current study, Chen mentioned that teacher error correction and communication with other excellent English users are helpful for her English pronunciation learning. The idea of teacher error correction came from her experiences in English pronunciation since primary school. When Chen attended the two tutoring institutions, "*Susan English*" and "*CC English*" that aimed to cultivate learners' English communicative abilities, the teachers spent a lot of effort correcting segmental errors like vowels and consonants in the words during oral exercises. Moreover, during her senior high school days, Chen's English teacher also guided her on super-segmental features such as stress,

liaison, and intonation when she did the recitation activity of 20 English texts. It further improved her pronunciation accuracy. Hence, Chen thought that teacher correction was the most efficient and direct way to improve her English pronunciation proficiency.

“Interviewer: Why do you think teacher correction is a good way?

Chen: I have a lot of teacher-correction experience both in training institutions and in senior high school. The teachers corrected my pronunciation errors. This method was very efficient. They pointed out my English pronunciation problems directly. If I explore on my own, I may get bored. I am unable to figure the error out. Then I have to correct it again. It's really a waste of time.”

(CIT4-77-80)

In terms of communication strategy, Chen believed that a good and effective way to learn English pronunciation was by communicating orally with other native speakers or advanced learners with native-like English pronunciation. She discovered this during her English oral communication experience in extracurricular training institutions, and during her travel to Hong Kong and Macau where she had the opportunity to interact with native English speakers. Chen was of the view that the essence of English learning was communication, thus only by applying the theoretical knowledge learned in real life can a language be truly mastered. She admitted that some of her current problems with English pronunciation, such as a lack of fluency, may be due to a lack of oral communication with others who are better than her.

“I think the essence of learning English pronunciation is communication. Whether you are learning English, Chinese or Japanese, communication is very important. If you were in context, you would listen, speak, and even think in that language. This is a natural thing. Without an environment to talk, it would be quite challenging to achieve standard level.”

(CIT2-400-402)

Meta-cognitive strategy

Dörnyei (2005) defined meta-cognitive strategies as involving higher-order strategies aimed at analyzing, monitoring, evaluating, planning, and organizing one's learning process. In this study, Chen seemed to have a clear understanding of her pronunciation learning goals and the learning content that needs to be achieved, as well as the pronunciation difficulties that need to be overcome at different stages of learning. In her view, aimless learning was ineffective. For example, at the current learning stage, she believed what she needed to focus on was accuracy, hence she took the initiative to ask the teacher for strategies and methods. The following narrative illustrates Chen's meta-cognitive strategy:

“Interviewer: You mentioned systematic learning. What systematic learning do you mean?

Chen: It's your own learning plan. You have to know what you are lacking and then make up for it in a targeted manner. You can't learn aimlessly, which means you can't gain anything. I arrange the learning tasks each day and then implement them step-by-step.”

(CIT4-386-390)

Affective strategy

Dörnyei (2005) referred to affective strategies as involving taking control of the emotional (affective) conditions and experiences that shape one's subjective involvement in learning. Chen was a student with a high sense of self-efficacy. In her past and present English pronunciation learning experiences, she encouraged herself and believed that she could reach the standard General American(GA). Despite encountering

difficulties in the process of learning pronunciation, she reminded herself not to give up easily. When feeling anxious and depressed, Chen would listen to music, sing some English songs, write in her diary, talk to her friends, and watch celebrity speeches to help her regain her confidence and motivation. Hence, she believed that a good and positive mindset was instrumental in achieving good pronunciation.

“Interviewer: What should you do when you encounter difficulties learning pronunciation?”

Chen: Sometimes I find it too difficult to be patient. I would write a diary to comfort myself and say that I should be patient, or tell my friends that I find it difficult. Then they would encourage me. And I would also think about conquering it. Anyway, I would find many things to help me.

Interviewer: More details?

Chen: Singing English songs, listening to Ted speeches, etc., to regulate my mood and reduce my anxiety. I often watch *Taylor Swift's* speech that encourages us to believe in ourselves, etc.”

(CIT2-119-127)

4.2.3 Chen's Investment

In this section, discussion of Chen's investment in English pronunciation learning is guided by the second research question as follows:

2. How do English major students in China invest in their English pronunciation learning?

Chen believed that English pronunciation was important because it was not only conducive to improving communication skills, integrating into the imaginary community, making a high-quality circle of friends, and achieving cultural capital, but also beneficial to constructing different imagined identities such as a singer, blogger, and English teacher. Thus, Chen took her agentive power to invest a lot of energy and

effort into learning English pronunciation. The theme that discussed Chen's pronunciation of investment behaviors was "Diverse Investment" and "Key Challenge".

4.2.3.1 Diverse Investment

Chen's yearning for and emphasis on General American pronunciation was vividly displayed in her English pronunciation investment behavior in and out of the classroom. In the interview, Chen said that she was willing to participate in teaching and learning activities related to English pronunciation to overcome her English pronunciation learning difficulties. However, there was scarce English phonetic knowledge involved in most classes. She may at most occasionally invest her energy in Spoken English class to practice accuracy or sporadically gain bits and pieces of phonetic knowledge in the English Listening and Speaking class. In order to confirm the data gained in the interview, I followed her suggestion to observe the Spoken English class and the English listening and speaking class three times and two times respectively.

4.2.3.1.1 A strategic active learner of English pronunciation in the classroom

Based on the researcher's observation in the Spoken English class, Chen paid attention to how her foreign teacher organized sentence structures and imitated the teacher's intonation and tone to improve her English thinking and English pronunciation fluency. In the interview, Chen admitted that despite the teacher's English accent was not the GA, she still felt that most of the time her foreign teacher's tones, and rising or falling intonation were quite good. Thus, Chen was likely to learn from the foreign teacher how

to organize sentences and pause between sentences. This was illustrated by the following narrative:

"Interviewer: How do you think of your Spoken English teacher's pronunciation?

Chen: His oral English with a Pakistan accent.

Interviewer: You said your goal is GA. But I found that you imitated his pronunciation.

Chen: I didn't want to learn Pakistani-accented English. Although sometimes his English pronunciation was not native-likeness, the sentences, tones, and rising or falling intonation he spoke were good. These were my weaknesses.

Interviewer: what do you mean?

Chen: I think his spoken English was not broken English and I want to learn how he organizes sentences and pauses between sentences, then improve my fluency."

(COESTI-70-80)

Generally speaking, in the Spoken English class, there were no specific English phonetic teaching and learning activities. The question-and-answer and topic discussion activities related to English pronunciation were occasionally conducted. Chen was keen to participate in these scarce social activities and employed different investment strategies. In the simpler task like the question-and-answer session, she practiced with the classmate seated next to her. This girl had weak English pronunciation skills and could only manage simple conversation. Most of the time, Chen helped correct her inaccurate pronunciation concerning single words. However, when it came to topic discussion, Chen chose other classmates who were more proficient and advanced in English pronunciation to improve her fluency. Chen believed that this would help her to have more meaningful communication, and provide better opportunities to share different viewpoints while practicing sharpening her English expression skills. Additionally, Chen took the opportunity to learn more about pronunciation from these

advanced students. The following illustrated Chen's different investments to increase her pronunciation skills;

“Interviewer: How do you evaluate your performance in different activities?

Chen: In terms of the topic discussion activity, I would like to ask Zengqiao whose English pronunciation is good enough to start a sudden conversation without any time for preparation. That's, why I think she is be able to accept small challenges and we two can talk fluently and learn from each other. However, If it is a simple question-and-answer activity, I will finish it with Yaoyao who needs me to do some pronunciation correction. I will choose different partners based on the difficulty of the activity. ”

(COESTI-303-328)

However, even though Chen tried her best to improve her English pronunciation in the Spoken English class, she expressed her disappointment with the foreign teacher's boring teaching methods in the class. She complained that the spoken English teacher did not understand Chinese students' needs and usually carried out some uncreative activities like simple question-and-answer activity. What is worse, the foreign teacher did not give feedback on the students' assignments. Rather, the teacher was just intent on completing his teaching task. Hence, Chen was unwilling to participate. Once she even shared her opinion with the teacher, wishing to give more freedom to them to talk rather than force them to participate in activities without much creativity.

“Me: How did you feel (about) the spoken English class?

Chen: The foreign teacher was not easy to get along with and his instruction was always boring, without creativity. He didn't know much about our needs and some activities are often too simple to participate in ”

(COECStIT2-90-93)

Similarly, in Chen's English Listening and Speaking class, the teacher's main focus was on listening exercises from the workbook. Based on the three times observations the researcher conducted in this class, there was hardly any guidance on English pronunciation except for one class where the teacher directly analyzed phonetic knowledge. Despite the lack of guidance on English pronunciation, Chen liked to attend to the class because the teacher had good English pronunciation as she was also engaged in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) training. As part of her investment to improve her English pronunciation, Chen sat in the front row where she was able to participate fully in all the class activities, especially the pronunciation instruction exercises. For example, when the teacher talked about stress and weak form in a particular sentence, she listened intently to the teacher's instruction, raised her hand to demonstrate, and welcomed the teacher's suggestions for improvement. The following interview extract showed Chen's investment in suprasegmental feature learning, such as strong form and weak form in the sentence;

“Teacher: let's look at the sentence. **Chang** was *feeling very unhappy* because a friend had died. The bold parts should be read loader and more clearly than other parts. Understand?”

Students: Yes.

Teacher: Any volunteers read for us?

Chen: I want to have a try (hands up).

Teacher: okay.

Chen: **Chang** was *feeling very unhappy* because a friend had died.

Teacher: a friend had died. Only the bold parts should be read stronger, and the other parts could be read weaker. Read again.

Chen: **Chang** was *feeling very unhappy* because a friend had died.

Teacher: Good. Sit down please.”

(CELSFN - 5 -15)

In addition, when she practiced strong and weak form phonological in the dialogue exercises, her teacher pointed out that her problem was not strong form but weak form.

“Chen: *I don’t really understand why people want to share these private feelings with strangers. That’s my point. The walls popular because sometimes it is easier to share them in public with stranger. That’s a good point. Metro.*

Teacher: Please listen to the tape again.

.....

Audio: “*I don’t really understand why people want to share these private feelings with strangers. That’s my point. The walls popular because sometimes it is easier to share them in public with stranger. That’s a good point. Metro*”.....

Teacher: Clear?

Chen: ...(No response)

Teacher: listen to me, because sometimes it is easier to share them in public with stranger.

Chen: because sometimes it is easier to share them in public with stranger.

Teacher: Read weaker, such as in and with in the sentence.

Chen: easier to share them in public with stranger.

Teacher: O.K. Do more reading exercises about weak form. Sit down please.”

(CLSFN-17 -25)

During the class break, Chen approached the teacher to seek advice and to clarify her weaknesses. The teacher explained that some of the phonetic phonemes in the words she pronounced were too strong. The teacher added when Americans speak English, their pronunciation is not so strong and some phonemes are weakly pronounced by them. The teacher advised her to pay more attention to these details such as the linking points between the former letter and the latter letter in a word. If these details are ignored, it would be useless for her to imitate the pronunciation even though they are repeated many times. The following narrative shows Chen’s determination to overcome her problems related to English pronunciation;

“Interviewer: After class, I saw you inquire about your teacher's questions.

Chen: Yeah. I wanted to ask her what could be done about the difficulties that troubled me, and then she asked me to read the sentences. After I read the sentences, she told me that some of the phonemes in the words were read too strongly. The native speaker usually didn't pronounce as strong as us. Sometimes, they would omit some pronunciation. Then she said that I should pay more attention to these details. For example, how to connect the pronunciation of the last letter with the next letter. Otherwise, it was useless to imitate it even more than ten times.

Interviewer: What do you think of her suggestion?

Chen: I was very happy and relieved, and I finally knew the factors influencing my weak form. I approve of her suggestion. I thought next time, if there was a problem, I would also go to ask her for help because she was an expert and willing to give guidance.”

(CLSSStI-446-456)

In short, her classroom English pronunciation investment behaviors based on classroom observation were influenced by her General American English pronunciation learning goal belief. To achieve her English pronunciation learning goals, she explored all possibilities to overcome her pronunciation difficulties, such as actively participating in classroom activities, seeking guidance from teachers, and imitating her foreign teacher's pronunciation. However, it cannot be denied that there were insufficient English pronunciation activities both in the Spoken English class and the English Listening and Speaking class that Chen attended. It would appear that her autonomous learning outside of the classroom such as singing English songs, doing English listening exercises, English dubbing exercises, and learning phonetic knowledge through network resources were the main English pronunciation learning investment behaviors that mapped her beliefs in improving her English pronunciation. In the following part, I analyzed it in detail.

4.2.3.1.2 An autonomous English pronunciation learner out of classroom

In her daily life, Chen often sang English songs to improve her pronunciation. The accuracy of English pronunciation was her top priority in the process of singing English songs. Aiming to interpret the theme expressed in the song, she kept practicing the lyrics, listening to how the singer dealt with the liaison in the words and sentences as well as certain phoneme sounds of the single English word. For example, one day, when she rehearsed the song "*Brave*" for Sino foreign cultural exchange activities of a foreign language school to express the loss and despair, she listened to the original song, again and again, to understand how to sing each word and sentence. She described the experience of learning and singing this song in detail in her diary.

“Before I sang this song, I would practice the lyrics many times until I completely understand how the singers sang and how they dealt with the liaison between words and sentences. My problem about this song was that the last word ***brave*** in the sentence was ***I want to see you be brave***. I pronounced the ***ave*** as ***an/e/*** sound. But if I pronounced it out loud, it would sound very sharp and unstable. Through trial and error, I replaced it with the ***/ei/*** sound. Then, the quality of my pronunciation improved, and the whole sentence sounded clearer and more stable. This experience enlightened me to pay more attention to the pronunciation of some phonemes in the words when I couldn’t sing English songs well.”

(CD-11-18-April-14)

Meanwhile, since Chen is still a freshman, her main focus is to pass the college English-grade exams, such as CET-4 and CET-6, with excellent scores. She believed that having good English pronunciation would assist her in obtaining top marks in the exams. Her strategy was to practice English listening exercises and then conduct shadow reading on the parts that sounded difficult. In the process, she immersed herself in the various characters and personalities from the selected reading materials and then recorded her

pronunciation. Next, she compared her recording with the original pronunciation. In her diary, she described the process of phonetic learning in detail.

“When I was doing listening exercises today, I came across an English speech on the theme of "gratitude". The speaker who gave this speech was a gentle and eloquent female teacher. Her American English pronunciation matched my goals so I imagined myself as her and then read and imitated her. Besides, two students expressed their opinions on the topic of gratitude. One of the male students answered the question with an uncertain tone, so his tone of "thank you" and "satisfaction" would rise. At this moment, I imagined myself as this boy, and then imitated his pronunciation and intonation. To improve my accuracy, I put my effort into liaison in words, and weak forms of some function words. For example, what about this—writing down a few things that you're thankful for each day? The that was read fast and weak to connect to the next one, you, and another example; those are all great ideas. The pronunciation of t of the first word great and i of the second-word ideas were linked together so that great ideas sounded like grea(t)-ideas.”

(CD-25-38-April-13)

Besides, Chen did some English dubbing exercises. In the interview, Chen stated that English pronunciation is the soul of the English language. She found it interesting to understand and use different intonations, strong forms, weak forms and pauses to show different characters' personalities and emotions. Whenever she had some free time, she would do some English dubbing exercises with dubbing software apps to imitate the pronunciation of various characters. In her diary, she described in detail how to learn English phonetic knowledge while dubbing an American sitcom called *Broke Girls*.

“Because I enjoyed watching *Broken Girls*, I happened to find a clip about it. I first listened to the dialogue between the two women, then began to imitate. In order to better show their get-rich-overnight mentality, I did the mark about rising and falling intonation, weak form, strong form and pause to assist me.”

(CD-1-3-May-13)

Another strategy to invest in her English pronunciation learning and to overcome pronunciation difficulties is to use Baidu, China's largest search engine provider. She also subscribed to several English bloggers and listened to their advice on pronunciation learning. For example, from Andrew Cap, she learned that there was no need to deliberately raise or lower the tone and intonation when speaking but to adjust it to the specific situation. In her diary, she wrote:

“Watching Andrew’s videos gave me a lot of inspiration. Andrew said there was no need to worry so much about the intonation of pronunciation. For example, intentionally raising or lowering the tone and intonation. You just read normally and it sounds like a native speaker. I hold the same view myself.”

(CD-8-12-April-3)

In summary, Chen negotiated kinds of active learner identities to invest in English pronunciation with diverse strategies in and out of the classroom. Her main effort, energy, and time were focused both on segmental and supra-segmental features such as phonetic symbols, intonation, weak and strong form, pause, liaison, and omission. Despite the many obstacles in her learning process, Chen always remained positive and resourceful in investing in English pronunciation learning.

4.2.3.2 Key challenge

4.2.3.2.1 Perceived difficulties in establishing social relationships with exchange students on campus

Although Chen invested in English pronunciation with multiple strategies, the lack of interaction with other students who were more proficient in English pronunciation

hampered her communicative beliefs. As an extroverted and social learner, she was always eager to communicate with other advanced learners like foreign students on campus to improve her English pronunciation because she felt that her classmates' English pronunciation was not good enough to inspire her. Chen complained that it is quite difficult to figure out why the foreign language school did not provide any space for free interaction between the local and foreign students.

“Interviewer: How did you think of your classmates' pronunciation level?

Chen: I didn't know how to comment. I thought their pronunciation had many problems, which made me hesitant to communicate with them. It didn't give much help. I preferred to communicate with people who were better than myself. But somehow, the school seemed to have no English corner to provide us with opportunities to communicate with international students.”

(CIT4-140-145)

In her dairy, she also wrote that she was struggling to find any foreign students for communication practice.

“Today, when I did the listening exercise about oral English, the speaker said that the way to improve English pronunciation is communication. I felt sad that the number of times I spoke English in my ordinary life was very small, because of the lack of foreign friends. If I had a friend who is an international student, then my chances of speaking English would increase a lot. ”

(CD-13-15-April-19)

4.2.3.2.2 Unfair power relations affected investment in the English pronunciation learning

In addition, although Chen wanted to improve her English communication skills, her efforts were hampered by the environment around her. Due to the influence of long-

term exam-oriented education that does not emphasize oral English, few students around her were willing to communicate in English with her. Even though she took the initiative to communicate in English, her classmates satirized her for deliberately showing off her perceived English prowess.

“Interviewer: You mentioned that it was influenced by the environment so you rarely communicated with each other in daily life. Why?

Chen: Maybe my classmates are used to written- examination. Their willingness to speak English is not quite strong. Sometimes when I take the initiative to talk in English, they think I deliberately show off.”

(CIT4-437-442)

4.2.4 Congruent between belief and investment in English pronunciation learning

Chen who hails from the city had a privileged education opportunity since kindergarten. She was exposed to both American and British accents from various audio and video English materials. Although she admired both accents, the American way of living and pronunciation appealed to her more as it resonated with her outgoing and extroverted personality. Chen believed that having good English pronunciation would improve her ability to communicate and help her obtain high scores on the listening test. In addition, a good English pronunciation would help her become friends with her favorite celebrities and integrate better into other Western communities as well as realize her imagined identities of being an English blogger, singer, and actor. At the same time, combining with her direct and indirect English pronunciation learning experiences, she believed that cognitive strategies like imitation through shadow reading, dubbing, singing English songs, watching English phonetic videos and learning phonetic knowledge on the internet, social strategies like asking help from the teacher,

communication with advanced English speakers, an affective strategy such as self-encourage as well as meta-cognitive strategy such as self-evaluation can improve her English pronunciation learning proficiency. These beliefs were mostly congruent with Chen's investment as she kept encouraging herself and actively participated in phonetic learning activities, asked the teacher's help in the classroom and sang English songs, dubbed English short videos, did shadow reading, recorded her pronunciation and learned phonetic knowledge from English bloggers out of the classroom to overcome her English pronunciation learning difficulties with regards to suprasegmental knowledge. However, even though she hoped to rely on her perseverance to realize her goals, Chen was being pragmatic since the lack of a good communication environment would hinder her effort to improve her English pronunciation because her classmates were unwilling to speak in English and even spoke ill words of her if she communicated in English.

4.2.5 Case Lan

Lan, the second participant in this study, was an English business student whose English proficiency is rather poor. She initially expressed reservations about participating in the study as she admitted that she did not learned much English pronunciation in her daily life. She was worried that she might not be able to significantly contribute. The researcher told that she should continue her life as usual without need to do any changes. Lan finally agreed after the researcher assured her not to worry. She was a good listener and she could converse in Chinese, her mother tongue well with her own

opinions and logic. In total, four interviews were conducted and thirty-six of her diaries were read. Additionally, two stimulated recall interviews were held after observing her in the English Listening and Speaking class.

Lan came from an average working-class family in a suburban town in China. She received an average quality education in primary and secondary school and had to repeat her college entrance examinations twice before being accepted into university as an English major. In the second semester of her freshman year, she was diverted into business English. Unlike most English major students who were likely to take up English-related jobs, she was open to career choices after graduation. Despite majoring in business English, Lan loved the Chinese language and literature. Hence, in her spare time, she did not focus on English learning but spent time and energy on Chinese writing. With her keen literary talent, she once earned first prize in a national writing contest for college students. This boosted her confidence to engage in other professions other than English-related careers.

In a word, Lan has high emotional intelligence and can cope with life pressures because she grew up in a solid and warm family atmosphere with three other siblings. For instance, while her classmates were highly anxious about the TEM-4 examinations and the Graduate Entrance Examination, she remained calm and relaxed. As the study progressed, the researcher found that Lan could multi-task. While studying, she held several part-time jobs earning more than 3000 RMB in her spare time. Furthermore, Lan had good inter-personal relationship with both her friends and classmates. Although her

English pronunciation was not proficient, she had keen observational skills and actively participated in all kinds of teaching and learning activities in and out of the classroom. At the end of the semester, her comprehensive grades were among the best, having successfully been elected as an active member of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and winning the school-level special scholarship and the national encouragement scholarship.

4.2.6 Lan's Belief

4.2.6.1 The English pronunciation learning goal belief

Intelligibility

In terms of the English pronunciation learning goals, Lan thought that intelligibility was the most important. During her formal schooling days from primary school to university, she was exposed to both British Received (RP) English Pronunciation and General American (GA) English pronunciation. Consequently, she admired people who can pronounce English as standard RP and GA. In her mind, there was a hierarchy among different English accents, and RP and GA were luxury Hermes compared to other accents. Nevertheless, Lan found it challenging to acquire RP or GA in the EFL context as she lacked the language talent, and financial and social resources to hire tutors who are native English speakers. Her father who was an average wage earner working in a house improvement company could not afford to send her to any spoken English training centers or travel abroad to help her achieve native-like English pronunciation. Realizing the reality that she was an average student from an average family, it was more practical for her to treat intelligibility as an English pronunciation goal. The following interview excerpt and her diary notes illustrate Lan's realistic aspirations;

“Interviewer: What do the Received Pronunciation and the General American mean to you?

Lan: It is a symbol.

Interviewer: What do you mean “symbol”?

Lan: It means ability. If you can speak American or British English, it means you have a language talent, or you have such family conditions, such as a bilingual family where your parents speak English and you have been exposed to English since childhood. Alternatively, you may have sufficient financial support to frequently communicate with foreigners abroad, or you may hire a native English speaker for one-on-one tutoring to correct your non-standard pronunciation.

Interviewer: How do you evaluate yourself?

Lan: My parents have little education, and my family is not wealthy either. It's ordinary. An ordinary student with ordinary ability comes from an ordinary family. Accept the accented English.”

(LIT3-783-790)

In her diary, she wrote;

“I thought it made a lot of sense. It was very difficult to eliminate accented English. Elimination requires a lot of time, money, and energy. However, I don't have these resources. On the other hand, it is painstaking to make an elimination. Intelligibility was enough.”

(LD-13-15-April-22)

At the same time, Lan believed that there was nothing to be ashamed of in having a Chinese accent when speaking English. Instead, having an accented English pronunciation was inevitable since even the native speakers have their own accents. In the *Business English* class, she learned that there are different types of internationally accepted English accents, such as Indian English, Japanese English, and Korean English. Since these other nationalities were not worried about their accented English, she questioned why the Chinese made a big fuss about their compatriots' accents. In Lan's view, it was completely unnecessary. Her *Culture Introduction* teacher even told them that a person's accent symbolizes their identity. That is, as soon as a person speaks

English with an accent, others know from which country the person comes, and may even see the person's culture. Inspired by her teacher's view, she confidently suggested that accents were acceptable when speaking English and that accents were a lovely gift from someone's mother country.

“Interviewer: You mentioned that your pronunciation learning goal were intelligibility. Do you allow yourself to have an accent when you speak English?

Lan:..of course. It is completely understandable that Chinese people have an accent when they speak English. You see, both Indians and Koreans have strong English accents, but they have also been recognized. It is acceptable for people from different countries to speak English with accents. Chinglish is a characteristic of Chinese people. Don't feel embarrassed.

(LIT3-61-67)

Lan's experience interacting with a German student (a non-native English speaker) reinforced her belief that fluent communication is possible even without standard GA or RP. She recalled that although they both used different English accents, they communicated well with the help of gestures or facial expressions. It was this unforgettable experience that made her realize that people who communicate in English are not necessarily people from European and American countries, but may also be people from non-English speaking countries. English is a global language that connects people around the world. She should be more of an English speaker, not just an English learner. Even if she communicates with native English speakers in the future, she does not need to deliberately imitate the accent of native English speakers. The following account points to Lan's conviction.

“Interviewer: If you were communicating with a native English speaker, would you

consider yourself a user or a learner?

Lan: User. I think English is a tool. Once I communicated with a German student in different accented English. It is no problem for us to understand each other. There's no need to worry about the accent. Everybody should speak with confidence. Even if I communicate with native speakers someday, I have no intention of imitating their accents. We learn English to communicate with English-speaking people all over the world, not just to communicate with Europeans and Americans."

(LIT3-118-126)

In short, based on her learning experiences and social interaction, Lan believed that intelligibility was enough for her because the main aim of language was communication. As long as the one who is listening can identify accurately and effortlessly the words and expressions of the one who is speaking, this person is considered intelligible. In addition, Lan believed that accented English is acceptable because it indicates one's citizenship and user identity.

4.2.6.2 The English pronunciation learning importance belief

Cinderella

Lan's view of learning English pronunciation appears to follow the "Cinderella Syndrome- kept behind doors and out of sight" (Celce-Murcia, 1996, p. 323). Three factors shaped her belief. The first one was that English pronunciation played little role in her choice of future jobs. Unlike other English majors who want to engage in English-related careers, Lan had an open attitude toward her future career. She expressed that she could either work as a teacher, a foreign trade employee, or a job that does not need much English usage. If she had to choose a career related to English, she would opt to be a junior or senior high school English teacher with low requirements for pronunciation but more focused on written exam skills like vocabulary and grammar.

She would not want to be an elementary school teacher with high requirements for pronunciation. If she chooses to work as an administrative staff in a foreign trade company, she would choose one that does not need much proper English pronunciation usage. Thus, the choices of careers that Lan had in mind were the ones that did not demand much of her English pronunciation. The following interview excerpt illustrates this;

“Interviewer: Do you have any plans for the future?”

Lan: It's not very clear yet. I want to get a teacher qualification certificate. But I think the profession of teacher is too saturated now. I would like to first do an internship at a foreign trade company. If I don't like it, I will choose to do other jobs. Maybe it will be not related to English. For me, it's okay to transfer to other professions. Just work hard to achieve it.”

(LIT1-746-749)

“Interviewer: You mentioned that you want to prepare to take the teacher qualification certificate exam. Do you want to be an English teacher?”

Lan: Well, I don't want to be a teacher. Even if I will be a teacher, I don't want to be a primary school teacher because the pronunciation requirement for a primary school teacher is strict. Maybe I will be a junior high or senior high school teacher who focus on the written examination rather than English pronunciation.”

(LIT1-1254-1271)

Secondly, English pronunciation is not given much attention because high-stake exams do not test it. In her memory, since she started learning English, English pronunciation has never been the focus of teaching and learning. During senior and junior high school, English teachers spent most of their energy and time on vocabulary and grammar. Although her high school English teacher sometimes emphasized the importance of pronunciation for listening and speaking, in practice, both teachers and students still

focused on English skills related to the college entrance examination (Gaokao) rather than English pronunciation.

“Interviewer: How did you learn English pronunciation during junior and senior high school?

Lan: Our English teachers haven’t paid special attention to English pronunciation. Most of the time, they only asked us to memorize words, grammar, and texts, which are useful for the written examination. They did not pay much attention to English pronunciation as there was a need to test it.”

(LIT1-642-645)

After entering college, there was an 8-week English pronunciation course. This provided an opportunity for Lan to learn English pronunciation. This English teacher particularly emphasized the importance of English pronunciation for listening and speaking, and attached great importance to articulation place and position. Although she practiced the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) according to the teacher's guidance in class and tried to improve her English pronunciation, she did not invest much energy in English pronunciation practice after class. Lan stated that even though the English phonetic teacher attached great importance to English pronunciation, the undervalued status of English pronunciation has not changed in Chinese English education. Compared to English pronunciation, other English micro-skills such as vocabulary and grammar played a more critical role in passing written examinations such as CET4, CET6, TEM4 and TEM8.

“Interviewer: How was your English pronunciation learning in college?

Lan: There was an English phonetics course in the first semester. Our teacher strongly emphasized it. But I don't think English pronunciation is important. The TEM-4 and TEM-8 exams for English majors do not test pronunciation. If the

vocabulary is insufficient or the grammar does not meet the standards, it is a troublesome to pass these written exams. But if it's just poor pronunciation, it won't have any negative impact.”

(LIT2-478-480)

Thirdly, in Lan's case, English pronunciation has no value in her daily communication. There were very few opportunities for her to communicate in English, either at home or at school. Besides, in view of China's emergence as a major power, with one of the world's largest economies and world-class military, Lan noticed that there is increased foreign interest in Mandarin, the official Chinese language. Many foreigners are learning Mandarin and trying to pass the Chinese proficiency test. She believed that it is feasible to communicate in Chinese without speaking English when meeting foreigners in China. Therefore, having good English pronunciation is not a priority for Lan as it has little impact on her daily life.

“I think its status is pretty low, and everyone doesn't pay much attention to it, and it is ignored by us it played a very small role in my daily life as well. The chances that we needed to communicate in English were slim. Besides, a large number of foreigners are really fascinated by Chinese culture and even purposefully take the Chinese language competency test. Maybe, we can also communicate in Chinese in the future.”

(LIT1-638-640)

In summary, Lan believed that English pronunciation did not need much attention due to the following three factors; her open attitude toward employment, the focus on the written examinations that disregard pronunciation, and the increasing interest in the Chinese language coupled with dwindling interest in the English language.

4.2.6.3 English Pronunciation Learning Strategy Belief

When it came to English pronunciation learning strategies that can help her improve her English pronunciation learning, Lan felt that she did not have any specific English pronunciation learning strategies. However, in further questioning during the interview, based on a small part of her entire English pronunciation learning experience, three strategies were revealed. There were cognitive, social-emotional, and compensatory strategies. The cognitive strategies referred to imitation and participation in practical phonetic courses; social-affective strategies were about teacher correction and communication with advanced English speakers; and lastly, the compensation strategy meant the homophonic method. In the following chapters, each strategy will be described in detail.

Cognitive Strategy

Based on Lan's English pronunciation learning experiences from primary school to senior high school, there was nearly no explicit instruction about English pronunciation learning. She started to learn English in primary three. However, English as a minor subject was not tested and the main teaching goal of English course was to cultivate students' interest. Most of time the English teacher took the tape-recorder to the classroom, asked the students to listen and read after the tape without detailed analysis about English phonetic and phonology knowledge. In the junior and senior high schools, the teacher occasionally asked students to read the words or sentences after her. Nevertheless, English pronunciation learning was almost

ignored since the teaching and learning were focused on preparing students for the written exams. It was only when Lan entered freshman year that there were some changes in English pronunciation learning. The English phonetic teacher not only gave explicit IPA instruction that explained in detail how the words should be pronounced, but she also demanded her students to imitate as much as possible, using a mirror to check whether the shape of the mouth was correct when pronouncing the English words or sentences. Lan then practiced her pronunciation by listening to the audio recording and then imitating the words and sentences, marking the relevant phonetic knowledge such as liaison, plosive, stress, punctuation, sense group and intonation. Thus, her formal English pronunciation learning experiences led her to believe that imitation was the first key to improving phonetic learning.

“Interviewer: How do you learn English pronunciation?”

Lan: From primary to senior high school, I didn't know whether it was correct or not, so I just read along with the audio. The teacher asked us to listen to a CD attached to the textbook, experience the rhythm, and then read along. Later, in my freshman year, the English phonetic teacher gave us some explanation about IPA. At the same time, she suggested that we should imitate more instead of speaking in our own way. Hence, I formed the idea that English pronunciation learning was imitation.”

(LIT3-80-85)

In addition, based on her experience learning English pronunciation in the freshman year, Lan believed that taking practical English pronunciation courses will also help her improve her pronunciation learning level. English pronunciation teachers are more professional and have more systematic theoretical and practical knowledge, which can help her effectively establish a sound English pronunciation learning system. The

following interview excerpts confirm this view;

“If the pronunciation course hours were increased, it would be helpful for pronunciation learning. The English phonetic teachers were more professional. They can help us learn systematically.”

(LIT1-947-950)

Social Strategy

Regarding social strategy, Lan regarded the English phonetic teacher as an expert in the field of English pronunciation and believed that teacher error correction was a good way to improve her English pronunciation learning. She was convinced that the teacher had received systematical phonology and phonetic training and was more able to observe her pronunciation problems and guide her. Lan recalled, in senior high school, that most of her classmates, including her, were from the rural areas of China with poor English pronunciation skills. Worried that the poor pronunciation would affect their listening, her English teacher spent some time correcting segmental features of their pronunciation, such as the individual pronunciation of words during the students' self-introduction and test paper analysis activities. The most intensive and unforgettable pronunciation error correction experience was in the freshman English phonetic course. The English phonetic teacher spent eight weeks, almost the whole semester analyzing and correcting students in terms of IPA. This led Lan to believe that teacher error correction was the most effective way to improve students' English pronunciation.

“The senior high school English teacher and freshman phonetics teacher gave me some guidance on segmental features. With face-to-face correction from the teacher, I quickly mastered the correct pronunciation way without too many trials. It is most

effective in improving English pronunciation proficiency because the teacher has received systematical English phonetic training. I trust them.”

(LIT1-771-774)

This was also confirmed in an *English listening and speaking* classroom observation stimulated recall interview. When Mr. Liu sometimes corrected students’ pronunciation in the process of question-and-answer activities, Lan would listen carefully to check whether she had similar problems.

“Interviewer: How do you comment on this correction activity?

Lan: I think it’s a good way for us to pay attention to pronunciation. When she read each word, the teacher corrected her. It would be awkward. Next time, I would rather read slowly, but I must read it correctly.

Interviewer: Did you imitate your teacher’s pronunciation when he corrected the girl’s?

Lan: I was shocked at that time. I checked myself as well. How to say. At least I had a high degree of concentration. I would be very engaged in listening to the teacher's guidance.”

(LLSSt.T1-338-348)

Lan realized that another social strategy to improve her English pronunciation was to communicate with native English speakers or advanced English speakers in a real English environment. Based on her formal and informal English pronunciation learning trajectory, she lacked English communication experiences, which made me curious about how this belief came about. Lan said that language learning would be easier within an authentic communication setting, just like learning Mandarin in China. In the same vein, English pronunciation learning also needs a communicative environment so that can improve quickly and unconsciously. Otherwise, in an EFL environment where the daily language was Chinese, English pronunciation learning was a laborious task.

“Interviewer: You mentioned that communication with native or advanced English speakers is beneficial for your English pronunciation learning. How does this idea come?”

Lan: It is easy for us to acquire Chinese because we are in China. Therefore, I think if I were in an English-speaking environment, everybody around me would communicate in English. English pronunciation learning would be easier. English pronunciation learning will happen effortlessly. However, being in an environment where everyone speaks Chinese would render English pronunciation learning more difficult.”

Interviewer: Emmm....”

(LIT1-1125-1146)

In her diary, Lan also mentioned that communication in English is crucial for English pronunciation learning. She shared a blog story about the *Indian life of a Beijing daughter-in-law*. The blogger wrote about what she saw and heard in India. One of the articles was about how fluent Indian students and teachers speak English. This was because English is widely used in all instructions and activities both in the class and outside. Lan concluded that to be an English fluent speaker, communication at all levels, whether in the home, in the school, or outside, should mainly be in English.

“Mathematics books in English have been used since the second year in Indian primary schools. Teachers must speak English in class, and students often communicate in English after class. Almost all knowledge in school was taught in English. The number of schools with English-medium instruction accounted for 80% of primary and secondary schools in India. However, in China, only a few exclusive private schools can carry out English-medium instruction. Although Indians had strong English accents, their English-speaking skills were quite good. They are worth learning from.”

(LD-8-12-May-4)

Compensation strategy

In addition to cognitive and social strategies, Lan also believed that the homophony

method is useful for learning English pronunciation. This is due to her early experience of learning English pronunciation. Since teachers in primary and secondary schools did not teach English phonology and phonetic knowledge as well as learning methods, Lan was accustomed to using Chinese characters to learn the English pronunciation of words. Even though her teacher had told her not to learn English pronunciation this way as it may lead to misunderstanding, Lan still insisted that it was a quick and easy way to help her remember the pronunciation of words.

“Interview: Why do you think the homophony method is good?

Lan: When I look at complicated words without phonetic symbols, the homophonic method is useful to help me remember them. It will make me remember the sounds of words. Even though it may make my pronunciation sound less native, it is fine. It’s great if I can use this method to remember complex words.”

(LIT4-238-244)

Likewise, she wrote in the diary to memorize the word *Frustrate* with the homophonic method.

“Today I remembered the sound of the word *frustrate* /fra'streɪt/ with the help of the homophonic method "发誓追他", which meant failed to chase, so frustrated. This way, I can easily remember the meaning of the word and its pronunciation at once, but it's not accurate. The next day, when I saw this word, I hesitated and felt confused about how to proceed. But if I read it several times, it would not be easy to forget.”

(LD-April-2)

In summary, Lan’s direct and indirect English pronunciation learning experiences helped her form the belief that imitation, teacher correction, and exposure to an English-speaking environment for communication and homophonic methods can improve her English pronunciation learning.

4.2.7 Lan's Investment

Based on the second research question that seeks to investigate Lan's investment in English pronunciation learning, the following question guided the discussion.

2.How do English major students in China invest in their English pronunciation learning?

Lan believed that English pronunciation did not have much material or cultural benefit for her as she did not want to work in an English-related job. At the same time, English pronunciation is not examined in high-stakes exams or daily communication. Therefore, Lan did not put in much effort into learning English pronunciation. Based on classroom observations and diaries, the two themes of “incidental English pronunciation learning” and “key challenges” can describe her investment behavior in learning English pronunciation.

4.2.7.1 Incidental English Pronunciation Learning

As the researcher wanted to describe her complete investment behavior, the researcher asked Lan if she could learn some phonetic knowledge in class. Lan replied that aside from being able to learn pronunciation in a freshman English phonetics course, other English courses scarcely involved it. This semester, only the teacher in charge of Business English Listening and Speaking classes occasionally corrected pronunciation errors in question-and-answer activities. To display her classroom investment behavior in detail, I negotiated with the Business English Listening and Speaking teacher and went to the classroom to observe twice about 200 minutes in total.

4.2.7.1.1 An occasional learner of English pronunciation in the classroom

Based to the researcher's observation, the teacher's teaching mainly focused on the listening exercises in the book, and the learning activities included question-and-answer together with pair-work. The students were passively asked to do some exercises after listening and watching exercise videos. In a word, the teacher's teaching methods were quite traditional without much creativity to help students improve their English pronunciation skills, which was consistent with the findings of the interviews. Nevertheless, Lan was an active learner in the classroom. She took advantage of every opportunity to participate in these pair-work and question-and-answer activities. I was curious about her actions and asked her about the intentions of those actions during the stimulated recall interview after the class. Lan shared that she enjoyed participating in class activities but she did not care whether her pronunciation was standard or not because she only wanted to communicate own thoughts and opinions with her classmates. It matched her English pronunciation learning goal belief of valuing intelligibility rather than accuracy in the interview.

“Interviewer: I saw you were active in class. What was the purpose of participating in classroom activities? Did you want to practice your English pronunciation?”

Lan: I didn't think about pronunciation at that time. I just wanted to express my own opinion. Even though some words I was not sure how to pronounce, Mr. Liu didn't offer guidance. Thus, I ignore it. As long as my partner can understand what I was saying, I thought it was enough.”

(LLSStIT1-164-169)

Lan's experience in learning English pronunciation was from the corrections that the

teacher made in the classroom. For example, during the filling-in-the-blanks activity, the teacher asked a student to read her answer. When the student incorrectly pronounced a word, the teacher corrected it and guided the student to the correct pronunciation. However, when the teacher had to correct every single word that was incorrectly pronounced, the classroom atmosphere became a little tense. All the students became silent and the researcher observed that Lan focused intently on the teacher's corrections to avoid making the same mistake. In her view, it was embarrassing to be corrected in front of her classmates. The following narrative illustrated this point;

“Interviewer: Your teacher corrected the classmates’ pronunciation several times. How did you evaluate this activity?

Lan: I thought it could attract our attention to English pronunciation because it was embarrassing. I felt embarrassed at that time. The teacher corrected her pronunciation when she read each word. Next time, I would rather read it slowly, but I wanted to be as correct as possible.

Interviewer: Did you imitate when your teacher corrected her pronunciation?

Lan: I concentrated on listening to what he was correcting. The girl swallowed some sounds in a word.

Interviewer: What do you mean “swallow”?

Lan: For example, with the word impressions, she just read “I’m”, “im” and “im” several times. She was unable to read the whole word successfully. Then I spelled it myself in a low voice.

Interviewer: em...

Lan: After the teacher corrected it, I checked whether it was different from my pronunciation. That's all.”

(LLSStIT1-364-375)

In short, Lan's investment in learning English pronunciation was rare in the class. This was only addressed when the teacher corrected the pronunciation of individual words, which was reconfirmed during her second stimulated recall interview.

“Interviewer: Well, how did you think of your pronunciation learning in the English Listening and Speaking class?

Lan: From my perspective, the proportion of English pronunciation learning in the class was very small, almost none. The teacher paid more attention to listening exercises in the book required by the syllabus. Hence, our energy was to find answers to the questions. That is to say, under the requirements of this task, my ideas were to improve the accuracy of my answers. Even if the pronunciation of foreigners in the audio was good, I would ignore it. Moreover, when the teacher asked us to answer questions, we just answered in one minute at most. Don’t count on the teacher would intentionally correct our pronunciation or anything.”

(LLSStIT2-233-240)

4.2.7.1.2 An examination- machine outside of the classroom

To vividly describe her extracurricular English pronunciation investment, Lan recorded her daily English pronunciation learning behaviors by writing a diary. Out of the classroom, Lan’s energy and time were mostly spent preparing herself for the TEM-4 examinations. In order to get high score in the reading part in the TEM-4 exam that were significant for future employment, she took a certain amount of time every day to memorize vocabulary with the help of the *MaiMemo* app. In the process of encountering words with which she was unfamiliar, she would go to look up the pronunciation of the words. The following described how she learned the pronunciation in her diary.

“Today, as usual, I recited words with the app *MaiMemo*. I learned the word avenge/ə'vendz/ that meant revenge for, but I read it as /a'vendz/. Meanwhile, I thought of another word arise /ə'raɪz/ which meant produced, appeared, so I adopted associative memory to learn other words like away/ə'weɪ/, asleep/ə'sli:p/, America/ə'merɪkə/. The letter A in all these words can be pronounced as /ə/. I thought this method could make me understand and memorize unfamiliar words easier and faster. Moreover, incidentally, memorizing their pronunciations was also helpful for spelling words.”

(LD-4-7-March-23)

Additionally, apart from repeating a daily habit like reciting vocabulary with the app

MaiMemo, she also paid attention to the unfamiliar words while reading the text, then used the electronic dictionary to look up the Chinese meaning and English pronunciation of the word to help her better understand the main idea of the text. In the interview, Lan said that if she didn't understand the pronunciation of the word, she would feel bad. Similar feelings were written down in her diary.

“On Wednesday and Thursday, there was a *Comprehensive Course in Business English*. To better keep up with the teacher's instructions, I was going to understand the main idea of the text in advance. When I silently read the article *Talking Business? Watch your language*. I was not sure about the meaning and pronunciation of *delegate*, *insubordination*, and *obedience*, so I consulted the electronic dictionary to help myself get the correct pronunciation. For example, *delegate* was read as /ˈdelɪɡət/ instead of /diligeit/; *insubordination* /ɪnsə bɔːdɪˈneɪʃn/ instead of /ɪnsə bɔːdɪˈneɪʃn /; *obedient* /əˈbiːdiənt/ instead of /oˈbiːdiənt/.”

(LD-2-6-March-21)

Despite Lan's focus mainly on the sounds of the letters in words, sometimes she also paid attention to words borrowed from Latin, because borrowed words often made her confused about how to pronounce them.

“In the process of memorizing words today, I came into contact with *et al* / *et* *æl*, which meant something like this. However, I pronounced it as /etæl/ and linked them. They were separated and there was no need to link together. *et al* was Latin that was short for *"Italia"* or *"Italian"*, and it was often used when writing a paper citation. I thought such foreign words would hinder my pronunciation and make me feel confused about whether liaison was necessary or not.”

(LD-8-10-April-1)

Moreover, she sometimes also invested her energy and time in English grammar exercises. Lan said in the interview that before going to college, her teacher did not systematically explain grammar knowledge so that she made many grammatical

mistakes in the sentence structure. Due to the TEM-4 exam for English majors involves the assessment of grammatical knowledge, she kept learning grammar knowledge in the hope of getting more points.

“I wanted to pass the TEM-4 in June, so I did exercises about tense and voice in the twelfth section of *1000 Questions of TEM-4 Grammar and Vocabulary*. I first outlined the key knowledge related to tense and voice, then did the relevant exercises. As for the points where I have doubts, I would ask the internet for help to solve them.”

(LD-2-6-April-18)

To sum up, Lan spent little energy and time on English pronunciation, either in or outside the classroom. On contrary, she did much preparation work around the TEM-4 examination, such as reciting vocabulary and making up grammar knowledge. As for English pronunciation learning, it was just incidental learning when she met unfamiliar words in the process of reading exercises and reciting vocabulary or gained them in the process of occasional teacher-error correction in the classroom.

4.2.7.2 Key Challenge

In short, Lan had four key challenges in learning English pronunciation. Since there are no pronunciation tests in any of the major English language exams in the country, Lan adopted a “Cinderella” of English pronunciation learning. Other factors like personal and contextual have also hindered her investment in pronunciation learning.

4.2.7.2.1 A poor learner in English phonetic knowledge

Firstly, Lan revealed that she was not linguistically talented and found it difficult to learn and acquire English pronunciation. Being practical, she decided not to spend and invest too much time and energy learning the correct pronunciation as she was sure that she would not be able to achieve a satisfactory result.

"Interviewer: Do you consider yourself good at learning phonics?

Lan: Anyway, I just think it's quite difficult, so I don't want to bother with it anymore."

(LIT4-352-353)

Especially, Lan did not know how to learn suprasegmental phonetic knowledge. She recalled that in her past and present English pronunciation learning experiences, what she acquired the most was segmental features. Even in the English pronunciation course in the freshman year, the English phonetic teacher invested most of time and energy in segmental knowledge, such as the articulation manner and place of IPA, but just occasionally mentioned the plosive, linking, weak form, and strong form encountering in the sentences. As a result, she not only lacked systematic suprasegmental knowledge but she also did not know how to learn them.

"Interviewer: How do you evaluate yourself regarding English pronunciation learning?

Lan: I feel like I am just like a beginner and have never systematically mastered English phonetic knowledge. In the freshmen year, there was an English phonetic course. However, it mainly focused on the articulation of manner and place of the 48 IPA and hardly covered other phonetic knowledge. How to say. I stopped after getting a little knowledge of phonetic knowledge. The advanced English pronunciation knowledge, such as liaison, rhythm, etc., is more confusing. I don't know what to do."

(LIT4-369-377)

4.2.7.2.2 Perceived difficulties in establishing social relationships with advanced English speakers on campus

Thirdly, Lan voiced her dissatisfaction with the inadequate setting for communication. On the one hand, she complained that the English pronunciation proficiency of her classmates was the same as hers, so it was not conducive enough for her to seek help or improve. It was possible that the more they communicated with each other, the worse their English pronunciation would be. Hence, she gave up communicating with her classmates to improve her pronunciation.

“Interviewer: Why do you think it’s not necessary to communicate with your classmates?”

Lan: Because everyone’s English pronunciation proficiency is about the same. Their English pronunciation is also filled with errors, like mine. If I invite my classmates to practice together, we won't make any progress. Maybe the more we communicate, the worse it gets. ”

(LIT1-1230-1241)

On the other hand, Lan was prejudiced against international students on campus. Some international students speak English very well, but she was reluctant to make friends with them. She received some negative information about international students in China from online videos, which made her feel unsafe being friends with them. Lan was afraid that the international students would harm her physically and mentally because of some misunderstandings. Even though she understood the communication was necessary for English pronunciation learning, this prejudice was like an unshakable mountain that prevented her from seeking help from foreign students to improve her

English pronunciation.

“Interviewer: I saw many foreign students in the school. Why didn’t you make friends with them to practice your English pronunciation?”

Lan: I don't know if this could be prejudice or racism. They make me feel insecure. There is a lot of negative news about them on the Internet. I don't want to take the initiative to make friends with them even if they speak English very well. I will not contact them proactively.”

(LIT2-773-777)

4.2.8 Congruent between belief and investment in English pronunciation learning

Lan admired both General American and Received Pronunciation and saw these two accents as models for learning. However, her past and current experience of English pronunciation learning convinced her that there was no need to pursue standard pronunciation, and that intelligibility was more suitable for her. Lan did not deny that English pronunciation has an impact on listening and speaking, but she did not plan to engage in a job that required higher English pronunciation proficiency. As her English education experiences only focused on exams and vocabulary, and the fact that there appeared to be a decrease in the importance of English in the macro environment, Lan felt that English pronunciation was not a top priority for her. Therefore, although she believed that cognitive strategies like imitation, social strategies such as teacher correction, communication with native speakers, and compensatory strategies like the homophony method could improve her English pronunciation learning, she did not put a lot of effort and energy into learning English pronunciation. At most, During her preparation for the TEM-4 examination, such as reciting vocabulary and revising her grammar knowledge, she would incidentally look up the sounds of unfamiliar words with the e-dictionary to memorize. It was clear that her investment behavior was

consistent with her belief about the status of English pronunciation in learning English, indicating that English pronunciation has a marginalized role in English learning. In addition, some contextual factors such as lack of communication environment, difficulty in learning English pronunciation, and inability to process suprasegmental knowledge also led to her reduced investment in learning English pronunciation.

4.2.9 Case Ping

As the third participant, Ping with an English translation academic background was willing to take part in my research. She considered her English pronunciation to be of intermediate-level proficiency based on her teacher's evaluation and score on English pronunciation test. I contacted her English translation teacher first and then went to the tourism translation class to ask the volunteers to cooperate with my research in November 2021. Through the questionnaire, I got to know her telephone number and made an appointment with her to introduce my research intentions. The first impression she gave me was that she was thin, wearing a pair of glasses on her small face, and looking very cute and calm. In the beginning, I was not sure whether she was willing to participate or patient enough to stick to the end, as she asked me several times how long the data collection would last. Ping was worried that her participation in this study would affect her preparation for the TEM-4 examinations which was a crucial test for English major students. I felt her anxiety and tried to explain my research schedule to make her relax. Besides, I told her that she could withdraw whenever she felt uncomfortable. Finally, without much determination, she agreed to try as she would like

to know what qualitative research was. Luckily enough, with the progress of the data collection, Ping told me she enjoyed it and was willing to devote her energy and time to understanding her English pronunciation learning beliefs and investment behaviors.

Four months into the study, Ping had formed a good relationship with the researcher. Ping complained that there were limited activities related to English pronunciation in most courses. However, she suggested the researcher observe her in the Tourism English class because the teacher would correct students' pronunciation in their daily report activity. In total, four interviews were conducted, twenty-three of her diaries were read and two stimulated-recall interviews were made after class observation.

Ping came from a disadvantaged family. Her parents were migrant workers without a stable income to feed a family. Most of the time, her parents went to work in other cities and left her with her younger brother at home, in the care of her grandparents. As a left-behind child, Ping has experienced the hardships of life since she was a child. Therefore, she wanted to share the burden of her parents and make her family live a better life. In her mind, money was a panacea that could solve all problems.

Without more support from her family members, she trusted her teachers' instructions and followed the teachers' suggestions to make a decision. For example, When I asked the reason why she chose English as her major at the university, Ping said that she was influenced by her senior high school teacher. The teacher told her that English major students were better employed after graduation compared with chemistry graduates. Hence, even though she was good at chemistry and genuinely loved chemistry, she still

succumbed to practical interests to be an English major. In her second semester at the university, Ping was diverted to English translation according to her academic achievement for the freshman year. She didn't have much resistance to this arrangement because she thought that learning translation skills would be very beneficial for her in TEM4, TEM8, and the postgraduate entrance examination.

Born and raised in a rural area, she spent six years in a village primary school, where there was only one class for each grade with less than fifteen students per class. This is because many locals have migrated from the village to bigger towns in search of better learning and work opportunities. Recalling the schooling days in the primary school, she couldn't help complaining that the teaching and learning facilities were quite bad and the teaching philosophy was outdated. For example, throughout her primary school years she had never heard of English, let alone learned it. Thanks to help from her relative, who was a mathematics teacher, she got the opportunity to go to junior high school in another rural town. Ping's first introduction to English was when she was twelve years old. Having missed a critical period of language learning earlier, she initially felt miserable when she first encountered English in junior high school. Even so, she realized that learning was the best way to get herself and her family out of poverty and change her destiny. Thus, she persevered and studied day and night to learn English as much as she could. Her effort paid off and she was successfully admitted to the top senior high school in the Zizhong City, Sichuan Province. Her excellent achievement made her parents and teachers proud of her. During her three years in senior high school, as a science student, she worked even harder and eventually passed

the intense college entrance examination to enter university. These tough schooling experiences made her believe that success depended on her efforts to achieve it. In her words, no gain comes without pain.

4.2.10 Ping's belief

4.2.10.1 The English Pronunciation Learning Goal Belief

Native-likeness

During Ping's formal schooling days from junior high school to university, all the English teaching and learning materials she came into contact with were Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA), which shaped her admiration for these two English accents. Compared with other English accents, she thought the RP and GA not only received recognition all over the world but also sounded better. Moreover, they were easier to understand in the process of communication. Although she regarded Received Pronunciation and General American as standards for imitation, she could not tell the difference between the two accents. In the meantime, Ping admitted that it may be impossible to completely eradicate the Chinese accent when she spoke English because she was not a native English speaker nor lived in an English-speaking countries. However, unlike some English learners who compromised to accept intelligibility as their goal, Ping persisted that as an English major the ideal English pronunciation learning goal should be as standard as GA or RP.

“Ping: I thought that what we could learn and contact at present were GA and RP. Maybe there were other English speakers in some countries. We did not know what their English accents were. In the world, the standard of English pronunciation was GA and RP. Both of them are authentic, unlike our Chinese-accented English, which sounded bad.

Interviewer: How do you think of other English accents?

Ping: Unclear. For example, when we looked up the words, there were no Australian English and no English from other countries. For example, I just mentioned that there was a word, and there were two kinds of pronunciations under it, namely, GA and RP. If there were an African English phonetic symbol next to the word, it meant it should be recognized by our country and the world. If it were recognized, I would have more choices, and I would have more choices in learning English phonetics.

Interviewer: Oh, you knew other accents. But your goal was still to achieve GA and RP?

Ping: Because GA and RP are defined as the two international standards for us to learn.

Interviewer: Do they have any other advantages?

Ping: They are easier for people to understand. ”

(PIT3-141-150)

Besides, Ping insisted that it had something to do with being an English major student.

In her view, standard English pronunciation like GA and RP was a manifestation of comprehensive ability for English major students. Since entering college, she has discovered that learners with good English pronunciation can get more opportunities to show themselves, and they can be easily recognized by teachers and admired by classmates. Hence, Ping formed the perspective that standard English pronunciation was a symbol of excellence and the face of English major identity. If she had poor English pronunciation, it would disgrace her as an English major.

“Interviewer: Is there any other reason besides your long-term exposure?

Ping: The core reason for me is that I am an English major, and I must not lose the face of an English major. I wish my English pronunciation was as standard as possible.”

(PIT2-640-641)

In short, she was mostly exposed to GA and RP in her English pronunciation learning

experience from junior high school to university and her identity as an English major shaped her standard English pronunciation learning beliefs. Anything that did not align to these two English accents were not worth paying attention to.

4.2.10.2 The English pronunciation Learning importance belief

Cultural capital

In terms of the status of English pronunciation learning in English learning, Ping highly spoke of it. She thought that English pronunciation, like other English learning skills, was a basic element of English learning and played a significant role in improving English listening and speaking. This belief was not based on early English learning days but was newly acquired from her English pronunciation learning experiences at the university. In the English phonetic course in her freshman year, Ping got to know English pronunciation for the first time, and the oral presentation activities in the comprehensive English class further helped her realize the role of English pronunciation in English listening and speaking.

“I didn't know the concept of pronunciation until university. I started to learn English pronunciation in the freshman English phonetics course. Especially in the comprehensive English course, the teacher pointed out my pronunciation errors after I finished my oral presentation, which made me realize that pronunciation was related to listening and speaking. That is, poor English pronunciation would make listeners misunderstand.”

(PIT1-508-510)

Besides, she learned from her senior alumnae that good English pronunciation can leave a nice impression on the examiner in the teacher qualification certificate assessment and the graduate entrance examination, thus it can increase the chance of passing the exams.

Hence, Ping realized, that in addition to improving her English listening and speaking abilities, English pronunciation also helped her acquire other cultural assets, such as the English teacher's qualification certificate.

“Once a senior alumnae shared that in the teacher qualification examination interview, the examiner was very concerned about our English pronunciation. Good pronunciation will make a nice impression on them, which can help us get extra points.”

(PIT1-861-864)

Imagined identity as an English teacher

Additionally, Ping revealed that she was worried that her poor English pronunciation would put her at a disadvantage in future jobs. Due to her disadvantaged background, she was determined to survive in society by receiving higher education and making a better future life for her family. She observed that although her previous junior high school English teachers had poor pronunciation, as long as they had a bachelor's degree, they could find a decent job. However, competition nowadays has become more intense. A postgraduate diploma is only a basic requirement for employment, but the requirements for English teachers' pronunciation proficiency have increased. Ping used the word “involution”, the most popular word in China today to describe the fierce employment of English teachers. In her view, as an English major planning to pursue a career as an English teacher, good pronunciation can enhance competitiveness.

“If I want to be a teacher, there will be a teacher interview. In the process, I had to answer the question in English. As soon as I speak, the interviewers will judge my English pronunciation. If my English pronunciation were not good, people would

think that my comprehensive English ability was poor.”

(PIT2-138-142)

She also wrote down the possible consequences of poor English pronunciation in her diary.

“I want to be an English teacher, and my pronunciation must not be as bad as it is now. If it were as bad as it is now, I would be rejected at the time of the job interview.”

(PD-51-52-May-19)

Her emphasis on English pronunciation was vividly displayed in her investment behaviors both inside and outside the classroom. In the *Tourism Translation* class, the researcher observed that Ping purposely took notes to imitate the teacher's English pronunciation when the teacher explained the phonetic knowledge such as stress, weak form, and individual phonemes in the words. After class, she also took advantage of the evening time to read the VOA articles for about 10–20 minutes to imitate the fluency and cultivate a sense of English. In her diary, we can find some clues.

“Usually, when Ms. Yan was correcting the mistakes of her classmates, I recorded the relevant English phonetic knowledge mentioned by her in my notebook. In addition, in the evening, I would spend about 10 minutes reading VOA to develop my sense of language.”

(PD-2-5-May-19)

Generally speaking, English pronunciation was an important basic skill in English learning for Ping as it was not only the face of an English major student but also could improve her listening and speaking abilities and help her realize her imagined identity

as an English teacher.

4.2.10.3 The English Pronunciation Learning Strategy Belief

When discussing her pronunciation learning strategies, Ping felt a little embarrassed because she did not know how to learn pronunciation well. Based on a small amount of pronunciation learning experience from junior high school to university, she believed that cognitive strategies such as imitation, memory strategies such as remembering the pronunciation of words, and social strategies like teacher error correction and communication can help her English pronunciation learning.

Cognitive strategy

When it came to the cognitive strategy, Ping thought imitation was a good way to improve English pronunciation. She started to learn English in junior high school. However, as her English teachers' attention was on examination-related skills like grammar and vocabulary during the whole period of junior and senior high school, she didn't have any memory of English pronunciation. Even worse, the English teaching facilities at the school she attended were rudimentary, and there was no multimedia in the classrooms, which prevented her from receiving audiovisual English teaching. Most of the time, Ping and her classmates can only read along with the tape recorder brought by the teacher to imitate. Therefore, when I asked her how to improve her English pronunciation, Ping replied that she believed pronunciation learning was a gradual process that cannot be done overnight. Thus, sticking to imitation may be a good choice.

“Interviewer: Based on your experience in English pronunciation learning for so many years, what methods do you think can help your pronunciation?”

Ping: I feel that I have no way to learn pronunciation. I remember that prior to university we used to read along with a tape recorder in class. I think it is a good idea to imitate with an software. It is a convenient way, and there is no need to bother others.”

(PIT1-778-785)

In her diary, Ping recorded her daily English pronunciation learning behavior by reading after VOA for around 20 minutes to cultivate language sense. It supported her imitation belief.

“From March 6 to March 7, I read the short English essays for around 10-20 minutes in the evening.”

(PD-8-March-8)

Memory strategy

Since her English teacher had rarely taught English pronunciation during junior and senior high school, Ping had to figure out the pronunciation of English words on her own. Things got easier when she found that English words could be spelled with phonetic symbols, just as Chinese characters were spelled with pinyin. In her view, accurate pronunciation of English words was the basis for learning other English phonetic knowledge. Her English translation teacher at university reinforced this belief. The teacher told them that there was no need to intentionally practice suprasegmental knowledge. Instead, if they mastered the pronunciation of English words, they would gradually master other English phonetic knowledge like the weak forms, strong forms, and conjunctions. Therefore, combined with her own pronunciation learning experience and the teacher's suggestions, Ping was more convinced that memorizing word pronunciation was necessary, which would help improve her listening and speaking

skills.

“Interviewer: Why do you think memorizing the pronunciation of English words is a good idea?

Ping: I think the accurate pronunciation of English word is basic. Ms. Yan, who is our translation teacher, has similar view. I remember that it was she who shared that the most important thing about English pronunciation learning was that we could pronounce the English words correctly. She said that other English phonetic knowledge, such as liaison, weak form, and strong form, we can naturally master when we have read and listened to enough. In addition, she emphasized that there was no need to learn these supra-segmental features intentionally, and the main thing was that we should pronounce English words accurately.”

(PIT4-614-618)

Social strategy

Social strategies mainly include two aspects: teacher error correction and communication. For Ping, this idea of teacher error correction was newly gained at the university. In her freshman year, the comprehensive English teacher would point out students' English pronunciation errors after their oral presentations. She admitted that imitation was a convenient way to practice English pronunciation. However, some difficult English pronunciation cannot be solved by imitation. Thus teacher's error correction was the most effective way to point out her weaknesses in English pronunciation.

“Interviewer: What do you think is the most effective way to learn pronunciation?

Ping: I think we need teachers to point out English pronunciation problems to us.

Interviewer: Why?

Ping: Imitation on our own is not enough. Sometimes we couldn't be aware of the English pronunciation problems. In my freshman year, the comprehensive English teacher immediately pointed out our pronunciation problems after we finished the oral report. It is very useful.”

(PIT4-574-579)

The idea that learning pronunciation through teacher error correction was confirmed in the stimulated recall interview after class observation. When her teacher, who was responsible for the *Tourism Translation* course corrected their pronunciation errors after their oral report, Ping carefully wrote down the phonetic knowledge explained by the teacher.

“Interviewer: Did she have a comment after your classmates’ oral report?

Ping: Yes, she pointed out English pronunciation problems in terms of some words.

Interviewer: What were you doing at that time?

Ping: I was writing down some phonetic knowledge she explained in my notebook.”
(PTTstIT2-33-36)

Apart from the teacher-error correction method, Ping thought that oral communication was an essential method for improving pronunciation proficiency. As a staunch defender of GA and BR, she treated these two English accents as a model to learn from. In her view, the nature of English pronunciation learning meant communication in an authentic English context that was full of native English speakers. However, she received education from primary and senior high school, not in a metropolis, and the English education resource was poor enough to provide chances for her to contact native English speaker. Besides, her family were not sufficient to provide her with the opportunity to travel abroad. That is, she was living in an environment where there were very few opportunities to communicate with these native speakers. I felt very curious to ask her how this idea emerged. She was silent for a while and then shared two reasons. One was that she was deeply influenced by her teacher’s advice. From childhood to adulthood, she achieved progress under her teachers’ earnest instruction which made her

like to receive teachers' advice and treat what her teacher said as the golden rule to obey. Ping said that despite her English teachers emphasizing the written examination in daily instruction, they still told them the easiest way to improve English pronunciation was to communicate with native speakers. Because on the one hand it can cultivate their English thinking and on the other hand it improve their English-speaking ability. The second factor contributing to this belief was her observation of daily life. She saw some international students who came to China could use simple Chinese for daily communication within a short period of time, and their accents were not much different from the locals. This further helped her confirm that exposure to their native language environment and communication with them are the easiest way to improve their English pronunciation.

“Interviewer: Why do you think communication is the easiest way to learn English pronunciation?

Ping: Our teacher suggested that we should make friends with native speakers to practice. The other was the language environment. If we communicate with native English speakers, it would force us to practice our spoken English and talk with them in English. However, if we don't talk to native speakers, for example, because we are all Chinese, we will get used to speaking in Chinese in our daily lives. Like the foreign students at our university, they can speak Chinese in a short time. Even their accents are very similar to ours. With exposure to an English-speaking context, our English pronunciation would improve imperceptibly.”

(PIT2-62-66)

In short, Ping thought imitation, memorizing word pronunciation, teacher error, and communication could improve her English pronunciation learning. These three learning strategy beliefs were based on her teachers' suggestions and her own previous and current learning experiences.

4.2.11 Ping's Investment

Based on the second research question that seeks to investigate Ping's investment in English pronunciation learning, the following question guided the discussion.

2.How do English major students in China invest in their English pronunciation learning?

From Ping's perspective, the responsibility of an English major student is to ensure that he or she has good English pronunciation. Having good pronunciation not only helped the student to gain respect and recognition from the teacher as well as classmates. It was also beneficial to achieve high scores in the TEM-4 examinations, obtain a teacher qualification certificate, and pass the postgraduate examination interview. In addition, Ping believed that having good pronunciation could also help her stand out in the highly competitive job acquisition and realize her dream of being an English teacher to create a better life for her family. Therefore, to achieve these symbolic and material resources as well as realize an imagined identity, Ping invested a certain amount of time and effort in learning English pronunciation. The themes that discussed Ping's English pronunciation investment behaviors were "diverse investment", and "key challenges". The following will be shown in detail.

4.2.11.1 Diverse investment

Even though Ping shared several times, both in the interview and in her diary, that it was hard and painful to achieve standard General American, in practice she constructed different identities inside and outside the classroom to invest in English pronunciation

learning such as participation in English phonetic activities, memorizing word pronunciation, and imitation of English pronunciation. In the following parts, the researcher will display how she invested in English pronunciation with various identity constructions in different contexts.

4.2.11.1.1 A dedicated learner in the English translation classroom

Ping told me her teacher in charge of the Tourism Translation course was likely to correct their English pronunciation in the duty report each week, which was suitable for classroom observation. Hence, I consulted the teacher and finally got the chance to observe three times. The Tourism Translation class was on Friday afternoon. I went to the classroom ahead of time by 5-10 minutes to install the camera. From my observation, most of the time, the class was occupied by her teacher with lecture translation skills and exercises, such as Chinese-to-English translation and English-to-Chinese translation. The teacher sometimes conducted question-and-answer activities to check their English translation skills. Ping was cooperative with the teacher's instruction arrangements. Still, she never actively showed up to share her opinions as she was not confident enough to show her non-standard English pronunciation. In terms of English pronunciation learning, it happened in the 10-minute oral report in the second class. Two students took turns doing an oral English presentation on stage about their interest, birthplace, or any other topic that caught their attention. At this point, I noticed that Ping was browsing the mobile web page and wasn't interested in her classmates' oral reports. However, when the classmates' oral presentations ended and the teacher began to

comment on their English pronunciation, Ping immediately turned from inattentive to attentive. Driven by curiosity, in the stimulated recall interview, I asked her why she ignored her classmates' oral reports but cared about her teacher's comments on their English pronunciation. Ping stated that she didn't want to listen to her classmates' non-standard English pronunciation. She did, however, think that her teacher's remarks regarding her classmates' English pronunciation were accurate and may aid in her acquisition of English phonetic knowledge.

“Interviewer: Why not care about your classmates' English oral report?”

Ping: What they shared I was so familiar with, and I thought their pronunciation was not standard. Moreover, in the process of their oral presentation, I just like to take a short break.

Interviewer: However, I found out that you concentrated on comments from Ms. Yan after their oral presentation. Why?

Ping: Ms. Yan would correct our pronunciation errors, and I could get to know what I should focus on. I thought it was a fast way to catch my attention and improve.”

(PTStIT1-70-78)

Besides, It was worth noting that her teacher was more willing to correct their pronunciation of single English words rather than emphasized supra-segmental features such as linking between words or rhythm in the sentences after oral presentations. Ping agreed with the teacher's English pronunciation guidance, imitated the teacher's English pronunciation, and wrote down the pronunciation of the English words in her notebook.

“Interviewer: What were you doing when your teacher corrected their pronunciation?”

Ping: I followed the teacher to read, looked up the phonetic transcription of these words in the dictionary, and wrote in my notebook. Such as *dynasty*/'*daməsti*/, stress was the first letter, *planted* /' *pləntɪd* /, the last letter *d* should be read lighter, *southern* /' *sʌðərn* / rather than /*sauðərn*/, and the *famous* /' *feɪməs* / was /*ə*/ not /*ər*/.

Interviewer: I found your teacher liked to correct the pronunciation of the single words.

Ping: Yeah. She did, and I thought it was good to give feedback like this; it was very useful. It's not like me. I didn't even know how to learn; I felt like I had so many phonetic errors.”

(PTESItT2-35-43)

From the Tourism Translation class that she attended, it was clear that Ping placed a high value on English phonetic learning activities. She actively participated in the teacher's correction process in an effort to improve her pronunciation of the English language, which was consistent with her interview-based findings. However, it can't deny that there are limited interactive activities held in the class for students to communicate in English. Hence, outside of class, she took advantage of her spare time to invest in pronunciation learning. For instance, when she encountered unfamiliar words in the English TEM- 4 listening exercises and English dictation exercises, she would repeat the pronunciation of these English words and read along the VOA in the evening. In the following parts, I described her identity construction in extracurricular English pronunciation learning investment behavior in detail.

4.2.11.1.2 An autonomous segmental learner out of classroom

Ping sometimes did the English dictation that was part of the TEM-4. Her main goal was to practice English listening skills and hoped to improve listening scores in the written examination, but she enjoyed learning English pronunciation in the dictation exercises. To be specific, she usually chose a short article about 5-10 minutes from an application called "*XueXiQiangGuo*" to listen to, wrote it down sentence by sentence,

and looked up the pronunciation of English words she could not recognize. In the process, her energy was focused on the pronunciation of English words rather than sentences, although she realized that weak forms, strong forms, or liaisons make it harder for her to listen and imitate. In her diary, I found that she tried to learn the pronunciation of English words.

“This afternoon, I dictated a short article about *"Sanjiangyuan National Park"* through the *"XueXiQiangGuo"* software in my dormitory. I liked to see the scenery. This article was presented in the form of a video, which was just enough for me to see the beautiful scenery in the video while dictating. During the dictation process, if I didn't understand some words and sentences after listening to them several times, I would read the original text directly, then write down the words I didn't understand, check their phonetic symbols in the dictionary, and finally read along with the video. For example, I misheard stone /staʊn/ as /snaʊn/, and pool /pəʊl/ as /pu:l/.”

(PD-1-7-April-2)

What's more, Ping persisted in reading after VOA Special English for around 20 minutes from Sunday to Thursday every week to cultivate her English sense and fluency. She enjoyed reading after the VOA in a low voice in her dormitory, where she felt free as no one would judge her pronunciation as good or bad. In the process, she was very relaxed to feel the fluency of General American English pronunciation, tried to imitate without making any marks, and never blamed herself for being unable to read the same as the pronunciation of the audio. She firmly believed when there is a will there is a way and didn't require herself to master the phonetic knowledge that made her feel difficult at the current stage, such as intonation, liaison, etc. In her diary, she wrote like this.

“In the dormitory, I randomly selected an article on the VOA homepage for

imitation. The theme of the article was "*Teachers Use Games for More Enjoyable Learning*". In the course of reading aloud, I only required myself to master the pronunciation of words but never cared whether there was explosion, liaison, or intonation or not in the sentences, because I thought that if I insisted on reading after VOA for about 20 minutes every day, my English pronunciation would improve. Although the speed was very slow, I was not in a hurry. It was a relaxed way for me, as my roommates never judged my English pronunciation, good or bad, to cultivate my sense of English."

(PD-2-10-April-11)

As the researcher found that she just focused on the segmental features of English phonetic knowledge and never required herself to learn the suprasegmental features, I was quite inquisitive to understand the other reasons, except for being influenced by Ms. Yan's suggestions. Ping replied that her English pronunciation learning goal was to achieve an understandable English pronunciation proficiency, just like her current college English teacher. Among all the English teachers she has come into contact with, she believed that the English pronunciation proficiency of the university English teacher was the best. However, these teachers' spoken English was without much liaison, weak form, or intonation. Their focus seemed to ensure that their English pronunciation of the words could be understood by the students in the class. Hence, Ping assumed that as long as she worked hard to achieve the pronunciation proficiency like these English teachers, she would be able to get a job. After she can accurately express each word in the sentence, she will pursue advanced phonetic knowledge, such as rhythm, etc., to get closer to the ideal English pronunciation learning goal.

"Interviewer: I found that you didn't strictly require yourself to learn the standard GA or RP. How did you evaluate your pronunciation learning behavior?

Ping: The English teachers I have contacted since I was a child—I thought teachers in junior high school left an impression on my mind. Their English pronunciation

was not bad. When I was a freshman, I didn't have some knowledge about English pronunciation, and I felt that our English teachers spoke well. However, after two years, I became aware that their English pronunciation was not as good as I thought at first. Maybe now I am familiar with their English pronunciation and have found that they are not so standard as I thought. Now I just wanted to find a good job. I thought if my English pronunciation was close to my current university teacher's English pronunciation proficiency, it was enough. More haste, less speed. I didn't need to immediately achieve the ideal goal."

(PIT4-630-639)

In summary, Ping constructed different identities to invest in English pronunciation learning in and out of the classroom by memorizing word pronunciation, imitation, and receiving correction from the teacher. However, she neither took the initiative to make friends with foreign students nor had high demands on herself in terms of accuracy and advanced English phonetic knowledge. It was clear that her belief was not aligned with her investment. The following section analyzes the reasons for this non-alignment.

4.2.11.2 Key challenge

4.2.11.2.1 A poor learner in English suprasegmental phonetic knowledge

Ping thought that English pronunciation learning was difficult. In the process of English pronunciation learning, she never required her English pronunciation to be as standard as that in the audio and video. Except for being influenced by external factors like imagined identity, Ping felt that English pronunciation learning was not an easy task. For example, when she encountered English pronunciation knowledge like liaison, omission, or weak form in the sentence, her imitation score was not good. The following narrative illustrated this;

“Interviewer: How do you feel in the process of learning English pronunciation?

Ping: If I read the English phonetic symbols accurately, I will feel happy. However, when I read after the audio, it would score. If I read it twice more and get a low score, I will feel bored. I think it is very difficult, like liaison, omission, or weak form in the sentence, so I don’t want to read it any more.”

(PIT1-335-340)

Besides, Ping did not know how to deal with supra-segmental phonetic knowledge. She shared in the interview that the English phonetic course in the first semester was too short to cover enough phonetic knowledge, resulting in her lack of systematic English phonetic knowledge. Thus, even though Ping shared some strategies to improve English pronunciation, she mostly depended on these strategies to learn pronunciation of English words. Regarding her difficulties, like liaison, weak form, and other suprasegmental features, she had no way to deal with them. In her diary, she wrote,

“To be honest, I don’t have systematic English phonetic knowledge and have no idea what the specific problem was with my pronunciation, and I didn’t have any idea how to deal with it.”

(PD-35-April-9)

4.2.11.2.2 Written- examination-oriented culture

English learning in China was occupied with written-examinations. The foreign language school was more concerned about the passing rate in the TEM-4 and TEM-8 exams. However, those two high-stakes exams did not require English pronunciation test. Hence, since freshman year, both teachers and students have not focused on English pronunciation any more. In this scenario, Ping was of the view that the current environment lacked a conducive atmosphere for English pronunciation learning, thus

she did not feel the need to overcome any English difficulties such as learning suprasegmental features.

“Interviewer: What did you mean by following the general public?

Ping: In fact, the people around me would affect my choice. For example, if the people around me study English pronunciation hard, they will motivate me to learn. But if they are always lazy, I won't be as motivated. Now all my classmates are prepared for the TEM-4, and there is no English phonetic course involved, so I am too lazy to have higher requirements on myself to overcome those pronunciation difficulties, and I felt that it was almost enough to grasp the pronunciation of words.”
(PIT3-520-527)

Likewise, in her diary, she wrote a monologue about this.

“In my daily life, except in class, we communicate in Chinese. My classmates don't speak English. I think their English pronunciation proficiency is similar to mine. They are busy with TEM-4 examination and don't have intention to improve their English pronunciation. Hence, I may not have enough motivation to persist learning English pronunciation on my own.”

(PD-38-41-April-9)

4.2.11.2.3 Perceived difficulties in establishing social relationships with exchange students on campus

Ping found it difficult to make friends with foreign students on campus. She admitted that some foreign students in the university had very good pronunciation skills and could give her some guidance. However, foreign language schools do not organize exchange activities for Chinese and foreign students, which provide opportunities for making friends with each other and entering the social circle of exchange students.

“Interviewer: Why not make friends with foreign students on the campus? Their oral English is quite good.

Ping: English communicative activity on the campus is limited. There used to be an

English corner, but now it is canceled due to the epidemic. It would be good if the school could organize more exchange activities between Chinese and foreign students.”

(PIT3-544 - 546)

In addition, she was reluctant to take the initiative to make friends with international students. Ping thought that foreign students were usually outgoing and like to smoke, drink, and play games. Their lifestyle was different from hers. Moreover, due to cultural barriers, unnecessary misunderstandings and conflicts may occur during interactions. In other words, Ping's stereotyping of foreign students on campus appeared to be related to an ethnocentric attitude that inhibited her investment in English-speaking intercultural communication.

Me: You mentioned that there was a gap between you and the foreign students at your university. Could you explain more about the gap?

Ping: Estrangement. We were different in terms of nationalities and languages. That is to say, we may be people from two different countries, and our ways of thinking and life habits must be different. It may be difficult to communicate with each other, and then maybe create unnecessary conflicts both physical and mental.”

(PIT3-539-543)

In short, there were some contextual factors, such as written-examination-oriented learning atmosphere, difficulty in learning English pronunciation, a lack of knowledge to deal with supra-segmental knowledge, a lack of communication activity on the campus, and cultural estrangement between her and foreign students, hindered her English pronunciation learning investment.

4.2.12 Incongruent between belief and investment in English pronunciation learning

Ping was from a rural area without many resources to help her learn English pronunciation. Most of the time, she was exposed to General American (GA) and Received Pronunciation (RP) from the audio and video materials during her schooling days, from junior high school to university. Consequently, she formed the belief that the GA and RP were the standard English pronunciation. They sounded better and were the best among all the English accents. In her mind, it was a responsibility for English majors to learn pronunciation well because she thought English pronunciation as a basic element could help her gain symbolic and material resources. Ping also believed that remembering the sound of words, imitating, teacher-correcting errors, and communicating with native speakers could promote her English pronunciation learning. Hence, in practice, to pass TEM-4, and TEM-8 and realize her imagined identity as an English teacher, she constructed different identities to invest her energy and time in English pronunciation by reading after the VOA, memorizing the sounds of words, and paying attention to the teacher's corrections. Although Ping invested in English pronunciation with various strategies, the English phonetic content focused mainly on segmental features. It was clear that Ping's belief was in-congruent with her investment because of some contextual factors such as written-examination-oriented learning atmosphere, difficulty in learning English pronunciation, a lack of communication activity between Chinese and foreign students.

4.2.13 Case Ma

In November 2021, through one of my participants' recommendations, I went to the Educational Psychology class to ask volunteers to participate in my research. Through the questionnaire, I got to read Ma's basic background information and learned she was a minority. It made me excited to want to know how her beliefs were different from those of Han nationality students. Hence, I contacted her on my initiative. The impression she gave me was that she was tall, a little fat, and had a smile on her face. After I did a self-introduction and told her my research intention, she agreed with pleasure to participate in my research without much hesitation because she was curious about what a qualitative study was.

When I shared the research schedule with her and mentioned the classroom observation, she kindly reminded me that they no longer had English pronunciation courses but the Comprehensive English class occasionally involved some English phonetic knowledge. Hence, she suggested that I go to the Comprehensive English class to observe and promised to be cooperative with my research with her effort. Finally, in the flat that I rented, we had four times interview while I was reading her 11 diaries, some documents, and two times stimulated-recall interviews after class observation.

Ma, a Hui national, was born in a low-income family with an elder sister. Her parents were illiterate and could not provide her with any support in terms of education. She was educated in the hilly county of Miyi from elementary school to senior high school. Miyi County was home to 26 different ethnic groups, including Han, Yi, Hui, and Lisu.

Due to inadequate educational resources, ethnic minority students in the area were granted special privileges for their education. Thus, as a member of an ethnic minority, she was eligible to enter this university after a one-year preparatory program related to English education with the help of the special government policy, even though her college admission examination score was dozens of points lower than that of the Han students.

After entering college, Ma realized the gap between herself and her Han classmates, because she was not competitive in almost all aspects compared with those from cities with good economy in Sichuan Province. It made her couldn't help complaining that how outdated the educational resources were in her hometown. Ma said that she started taking English classes in her junior high school, but she did not do well in it. Although she loved the Chinese language and literature and had initially wanted to teach Chinese, as a science student in her senior year of high school, she was not allowed to major in Chinese language and literature at the university. Because of this, she chose English as her major instead after consulting with her family after realizing how employable it would be in the future.

With today's competitive undergraduate job market, many of her classmates are choosing to pursue graduate school to improve their job prospects. Her sister also strongly encouraged her to pursue a graduate degree and promised financial aid. However, Ma had other ideas. She would rather work than pursue further education because she found academic study to be torture rather than pleasure for her personally.

She believed that education was not limited to the classroom, and she can get more information in her daily life than in the classroom. In summary, Ma knew her own needs, skills and weaknesses and are able to choose the best course for her life.

4.2.14 Ma's belief

4.2.14.1 The English Pronunciation Learning Goal Belief

Intelligibility

Ma appreciated spending her free time watching movies and listening to music at the university, which allowed her to experience a variety of English accents. When it came to her favorite accents, she chose "General American" and "Received Pronunciation" without hesitation. She thought these two English accents were worth her time learning. This deep-rooted notion of English accent hierarchy stems from her previous and current formal English education experiences, which treated those two English accents as teaching and learning standards. Hence, she was unavoidably more accustomed to and emotionally attached to these two accents after years of immersion in them. However, when I asked her about English pronunciation learning goals, what surprised me was that her emotional admiration for both accents had become more rational. In her opinion, English was just a tool for communication, and it was not the mother tongue for Chinese English learners. Therefore, when she spoke English with Chinese accent was inevitable, and intelligibility was enough for her.

“Interviewer: Do you mind your Chinese accent when you speak English?

Ma: I think it is acceptable. Of course, it would be nice to own a GA or RP. However, the most important thing is that the listeners can understand what I am talking about. The language itself is used for communication. On the other hand, it is not my mother tongue. Therefore, it is inevitable to have an accent.”

(MIT1-1000-1005)

Besides, Ma regarded herself as a poor English learner. In her view, her English basic knowledge and foundation were relatively weak. Rather than pursuing standard British or General American English pronunciation, Ma realized she needed to spend more time making up English grammar knowledge that her junior and senior high school teachers had not taught systematically. This knowledge played a key role in her coping with the TEM-4 exam. Hence, unlike other brilliant classmates who were capable of chasing standard GA and RP, Ma believed that fluid communication was the most important element, regardless of accents or tiny phonetic faults. This belief is illustrated in the following narrative.

“Interviewer: Do you have a strong desire to achieve Received Pronunciation or General American?”

Ma: Yes, but not strong desire.

Interviewer: why?

Ma: If your English pronunciation is like that of native English speakers, it means that you are an expert and have learned very successfully. However, it is not suitable for me, who is a poor learner of English. To achieve native-like pronunciation would require a lot of effort, and I don't think it's necessary.”

(MIT1-948-956)

Except for her poor English learner identity, her muddling personality also shaped her belief in not pursuing standard pronunciation. Ma said her classmates actively pursued perfect pronunciation and prepared for the Graduate Entrance Examination and TEM8, hoping to find an English-related job in a metropolitan city after graduation. Compared with them, she joked that she was a member of the "Tang Ping Group" who had no higher requirements for improving herself and pursuing standard English pronunciation but only wished to live an easier life. That is to say, she didn't want to go to a

prosperous big city and compete with others but considered returning to her hometown to be an English teacher without high requirements for English pronunciation.

“Interviewer: What does that “high level” refer to?

Ma: For example, my classmates wanted to take the postgraduate entrance examination, and then they wanted to get a good job, earning a lot of money in the super cities. If they needed to acquire skills that could bring them profits, they had to learn them well. But I didn't want those things. I'd always had the attitude of muddling along, not being a perfectionist. I didn't think I needed so much money, and I didn't need such a high English pronunciation level to be a teacher in my hometown.”

(MIT2-392-399)

In short, her past and present English pronunciation learning experiences and her self-identified identity as a poor English learner as well as her personality of muddling along shaped her English pronunciation learning goal belief. English was a tool for communication and intelligibility was enough for her.

4.2.14.2 The English pronunciation Learning importance belief

Cinderella

Ma's primary interest in English learning was not English pronunciation. Although she believed that English pronunciation was related to English listening and speaking, her English learning focus was on English vocabulary and grammar, as well as other English skills that were tested in the written examinations. In fact, she largely ignored pronunciation learning because there was no mandatory examination required to test English for this particular skill in the exams.

“Interviewer: How do you think the role of English pronunciation in the process of English learning?

Ma: In my case, I think it is minimal. I might not particularly need it in my daily life.

Interviewer: How?

Ma: In most cases, I focus on vocabulary and grammar related to the written examinations. You know, English pronunciation is never tested in the exam.”

(MIT1-489-493)

As for why she formed the belief of ignoring English pronunciation, some inspiration can be drawn from her past and present English learning experiences. During her freshman year in university, she learned some basic English phonetic knowledge over 8-week English phonetics course. Despite her English phonetic teacher emphasized the role of English pronunciation in their listening and speaking, Ma sighed that the Cinderella status of English pronunciation remained unchanged. She observed that once the English phonetic course was finished, neither teachers nor other classmates paid special attention to pronunciation anymore. Moreover, in the same way that the college entrance exam ruled her senior high school years, written examinations like TEM4 and TEM8 that don't test English pronunciation now control her English learning in the university. Consequently, Ma couldn't help but expressed, “trapped in the examination box, I could not get out”.

“Interviewer: Did the freshman English phonetic course change your beliefs about English pronunciation learning?

Ma: No. Even there was an English phonetic course in the freshman year, I had acquired some English phonetic knowledge. But in fact, the entire English education system has not undergone substantial changes. The written examination that doesn't require English pronunciation remained the benchmark. It was very purposeful. Learn what should be tested. There are no other ways. I can't help it. I was trapped here, and I couldn't get out.”

(MIT3-245)

In Ma's mind, English vocabulary and grammar were the two most crucial skills to focus on in the written exams. In her junior high school days, the teacher spent time analyzing the vocabulary and some basic grammar skills, prompting students to recite the texts and conduct dictation. However, IPA and spelling rules had never been mentioned. Ma recalled that in order to memorize the pronunciation of English words, she wrote Chinese characters under these English words in the process of imitating from her teacher and tape. Even though she knew it wouldn't help her master the correct English pronunciation, it was a simple way for her to remember the English words. For her, vocabulary exclusively meant reading and writing, the two most important aspects of passing the exam.

“Interviewer: Did your English teachers in junior high schools pay attention to English pronunciation?”

Ma: No, it's all written knowledge, such as vocabulary and grammar. At that time, to remember the words, I used Chinese characters to mark the corresponding pronunciation.”

(MIT1-494-495)

In senior high school, more than ever, her conviction on the primacy of vocabulary and tests in the acquisition of English had been solidified and reinforced. Her senior high school class consisted of both Han and minority nationals, and as a whole, the minority's English proficiency was the lowest in the school. Therefore, to help them get the best English score possible, the English teacher spent a great deal of time and effort encouraging them to memorize the Chinese meanings of 3,500 high-frequency English words that appear in the college entrance examination. Besides, her English teacher informed them that English pronunciation would not be assessed on the examination,

thus they didn't need to master the pronunciation of these English words. As long as they can remember these words, her teacher believed they can improve their writing and reading comprehension scores, thereby increasing their overall grade. When I asked how she felt about her English pronunciation learning experiences in senior high school, Ma admitted that she could not recall much. She felt that since the entire educational system was focused on written exams, there did not seem to be a better way to change. The following interview excerpt illustrated her observation;

“Interviewer: How about your English pronunciation learning in the senior high school?”

Ma: I have faced the college entrance examination and the senior high school entrance examination since I started to go to school. Well, under these two big exams, there were specific language skills that you needed to concentrate on. The crucial point was that pronunciation was not the part to be tested. So, we just needed to concentrate on what was most important in the examination repeatedly, just like the 3500 words in senior high school. No longer would I focus on other things. Time was limited.”

(MIT1-931-934)

In addition, Ma believed that grammar was another factor that needed attention, as it was not only related to her English communication logic ability, but also needed to be tested according to the *English Syllabus (2000)*. Since her junior high school and senior high school English teachers never systematically explained English grammatical knowledge, Ma had to rely on her erratic sense of language to acquire English before entering college. She mentioned that once in a comprehensive English class, when her teacher and classmates actively discussed the grammatical structure in the text, she could only act like a bystander unable to integrate due to a lack of grammar knowledge, which made her once again feel that her basic English knowledge was not solid. In her

words, she not only lacked English phonetic knowledge but she knew very little about English grammar. Therefore, given that grammar played a key role in forming language logic and examination ability, she believed that grammar was more important compared to pronunciation.

“Interviewer: Why do you think grammar is worthy of your attention?

Ma: The school currently requires us to take the TEM4, which doesn’t require an English oral or pronunciation test. However, an assessment of English grammatical knowledge was required. That is, without English grammatical knowledge will negatively affect reading comprehension.”

(MIT1-493-495)

What’s more, Ma said she planned to return to her hometown to become an English teacher after she graduated. Most of the students in her hometown are minority ones with poor English foundations. In many cases, the English teachers have to combine Chinese and English to teach in order to make students understand. In addition, their teaching and learning focus is mainly on written tests such as vocabulary, and English pronunciation is rarely involved. Therefore, Ma felt that even if her English pronunciation was not as good, she was fully qualified to be an English teacher in her hometown. Therefore, English pronunciation learning was not a priority.

"I may be a teacher in the future. I tend to go back to my hometown and be an English teacher like the previous junior and senior high school teachers, focusing only on the skills tested in the written exam. Although I think they have made some mistakes, their method cannot be said to be completely wrong because these children have no English pronunciation foundation. If the teacher focuses on English pronunciation learning, it will not help them get high scores on the exam. So I feel that if my pronunciation is not good, I am also capable of being a qualified English teacher."

(MIT1-944-949)

To put it briefly, Ma was already a college student and understood the significance of pronunciation for English speaking and listening. Nonetheless, written exams were the center of the entire English education system, and there were no mandatory tests for English pronunciation. Furthermore, she planned to be English teacher in her hometown. These factors caused her to opt to overlook the English pronunciation and focus more on vocabulary and grammar.

4.2.14.3 The English Pronunciation Learning Strategy Belief

When Ma was asked what her learning strategies were for English pronunciation, she appeared embarrassed and was suddenly quiet. Since she had never heard or studied English pronunciation before attending college, she did not have any particular strategy or method for learning or improving it. Nevertheless, she said that teacher error correction and memorizing the pronunciation of the words were effective strategies for enhancing her pronunciation, based on her limited experience at the university.

Memory strategy

Ma acknowledged that she did not know how to learn English pronunciation, but whenever she came across any unfamiliar English words, she preferred to look them up in dictionaries to find out their English phonetic symbols. When I wanted to inquire why she cared so much about the pronunciation of English words, Ma commented that her senior high school teacher's reading vocabulary teaching method only required the students to remember the meaning of English words, but ignored the pronunciation of

the English words. She believed that this was the reason for her poor English listening ability which also affected her ability to express herself correctly in English. Therefore, she believed that as an English learner, remembering the correct pronunciation of English words was the basis for improving her listening and speaking abilities.

“Interviewer: How do you learn English pronunciation?”

Ma: As far as English pronunciation learning is concerned, my requirements are not high. I just hope to remember the pronunciation of the English words. Because if I don't know the pronunciation of the English word, I can't understand the listening and speaking. So when I learn an English word, I first learn the pronunciation of the word. For example, I can look up a word and its pronunciation in Youdao Dictionary and then memorize it.”

(MIT1-328-333)

In her diary, Ma described her English pronunciation learning as follows:

“In this documentary, I listened to the English in the video. The first time, I would see whether there were some English words I didn't know. When my English pronunciation was different from that in the video, I would look up the word in the *Youdao* dictionary, such as “reality”. At the beginning, I pronounced the letter Li as /li/. After the query, I found that it was /le/.”

(MD-3-6-March-26)

Social Strategy

Ma said teacher error correction was a good way to promote English pronunciation learning. Ma believed that her unsatisfactory English pronunciation proficiency were caused by junior and senior high school English teachers who did not pay enough attention to their English pronunciation. Especially when she entered college, her recognition of this view became even stronger. For example, she received some guidance on English pronunciation errors from the teacher during multiple oral English report activities in the comprehensive English class of her freshman year. This not only

made her discover her shortcomings in English pronunciation, but also made her realize the irreplaceable role of teacher correction in pronunciation learning.

“Interviewer: Are there any classroom activities that have a good impact on your pronunciation learning?

Ma: There were not many activities related to English pronunciation in junior and senior high schools as English teachers directly exported knowledge to us with the cramming teaching method. However, there have been some oral English presentation activities since university. Our comprehensive English teacher especially enjoyed correcting our English pronunciation errors. I was corrected by her many times, and I was particularly impressed by her.”

(MIT1-689-696)

In summary, regarding English pronunciation learning strategies to improve her pronunciation, without much direct English pronunciation learning experiences and regarding herself as an English beginner, Ma thought memorizing English word pronunciation, and teacher error correction would be the appropriate strategies for her.

4.2.15 Ma’s investment

Based on the second research question that seeks to investigate Ma’s investment in English pronunciation learning, the following question guided the discussion.

2.How do English major students in China invest in their English pronunciation learning?

Ma believed that English pronunciation did not bring much material or cultural resources as it was not tested in any of the high-stakes written exams. Therefore, she did not put much effort into learning English pronunciation. Based on classroom observations and diaries, Ma’s “incidental English pronunciation learning” and her “key challenges” are described below to show her investment behavior in English

pronunciation learning.

4.2.15.1 Incidental Pronunciation Learning

I gained a thorough understanding of her everyday English pronunciation investment behaviors based on both the classroom observation and her diary. Ma told me no course involved much English phonetic knowledge. However, to help me collect more adequate data, she was considerate enough to recommend me to the Comprehensive English class to observe, as it occasionally involved English phonetic knowledge in the English listening activities. I took her advice and attended this session to observe in the hope of collecting some meaningful data. The teacher in charge of the course was ultimately willing to allow me to enter the classroom to observe after I made an effort. The teacher told me that only participants can be filmed, and other students, including themselves, cannot be filmed. Therefore, I strictly followed the teacher's requirements to record the class and stopped after recording it three times. In the following section, the researcher will display how participant Ma constructs her identity in the classroom.

4.2.15.1.1 A passive English pronunciation learner in the classroom

Based on the researcher's observation in Ma's Comprehensive English class, no direct English phonetic knowledge was displayed. The teacher mostly lectured and concentrated on text analysis, including vocabulary and grammar. Furthermore, her teacher set aside a certain time to go over the TEM-4 tasks in each class. Ma was cooperative with her teacher's instruction but tended to be a listener in the classroom.

The following extract from her Comprehensive English lesson observation showed her limited opportunities to be exposed to English pronunciation learning.

“Teacher: *As soon as* means immediately. While “*Hardly.... when* is similar with *no sooner.... than*”. This sentence is about when they start, it began to snow. What tense do the verbs behind these two structures.

Students: (No response)

Teacher: What tense do the verbs behind these two structures?

Students: (silence)

Teacher: ok. “*Hardly.... when*”, which is compound sentences. “When” is followed by a clause that verb should be used the past tense. Then “hardly” should use the past perfect tense. That is, hardly they had started when it began to snow. However, “*no sooner.... than*”, *no* is negative adverbs. Therefore, the following verb should be followed by a flip structure. No sooner had they started than it began to snow.”

Students: yeah.... (Response with low voice)”

(MCEFN3-20 -32)

Occasionally, the teacher would ask the students to listen to the audio of the text in the classroom. Ma would read in a low voice and write down the pronunciation of English words she was unsure of. She said with a wry smile that this was the only activity related to English pronunciation learning in the class. During the stimulated recall interview, she confided that she focused on the pronunciation of the words in the process of listening activities.

“Interviewer: How did you feel in the process of listening to the text?

Ma: I tried to understand the main idea of the text, and sometimes I struggled with the word because I was uncertain. For example, *show the way—the way*—that I misheard as *a wedding*.

Interviewer: Then, what did you do?

Ma: I just focused on the sound of the English word because the teacher would demand that we listen several times.”

(MCEStIT1-62-68)

In a word, Ma's investment in English pronunciation learning was scarce because her teacher hardly involved English phonetic knowledge in the class, which confirmed what she said in the interview. Hence, I transferred my focus to observing how she constructed her identity to invest in English pronunciation learning outside of the classroom, as she had more opportunities to learn independently. However, extracurricular phonetic learning has not received much attention either.

4.2.15.1.2 An examination machine outside of classroom

Participant Ma considered herself a beginner in English. In her view, the most important thing was to fill in the English knowledge gaps so that she could pass the upcoming TEM-4 exam, rather than to improve her English pronunciation proficiency. Ma said that English vocabulary was extremely important for her to prepare for her written exams. Hence, she preferred to adopt Bilibili, which had a number of English learning resources, to memorize the TEM-4 vocabulary. Since most of her English vocabulary was reading vocabulary, which meant she could only recognize the Chinese meaning of the English word but could not pronounce it correctly, so Ma followed Bilibili to imitate the pronunciation of the English word. In the process, she gradually began to realize the fixed pronunciation of some letter combinations in words. For example, *the fy* of *intensify* was as read /faɪ/ and the *tion of intention* was read as /ʃn/. Admitting she had learned a little bit of English phonetic knowledge in this way, her aim was still to accumulate more English words.

“This week, I found a video about TEM-4 vocabulary from the *Bilibili* outside of class. Because I felt that I still had a lot of spelling problems when I recited the

words. Then I followed the video to imitate them. During this process, I learned that some letters were spelled with fixed pronunciations. For example the fy was read as /fai/ in the word intensify. It may be influenced by the teachers in junior and senior high schools. In my mind, I always thought that English words were extremely important. Although I had picked up some phonetic knowledge, I still paid more attention to accumulating English words in the whole process because not knowing words in the written test was not good.”

(MD-April-23)

Besides, as an interest-oriented girl, she liked to immerse herself in European and American movies and documentaries in her daily life. In her words, she "grinned her ears" in this way, which meant practicing her listening skills to make up for the listening test and cope with the TEM-4 exam. When she encountered interesting sentences, she followed to imitate, feeling the intonation and rhythm. In the meanwhile, she looked up phonetic symbols of English words that she was unfamiliar with, such as ru (/rʌ/) in the *rush* and *Russian*. She admitted enjoying this kind of accidental acquisition of English phonetic knowledge because it made her feel relaxed and stress-free. The following narrative illustrated this;

“This week, I chose a movie named *The Imitation Game* to learn English pronunciation. When I watched the movie, I immersed myself in them and adapted to the changes in English pronunciation and intonation, which made me feel relatively relaxed and happy. Occasionally, if I found that some words I knew the Chinese meanings but was unable to pronounce, I checked the phonetic symbols with the help of an e-dictionary, such as rush, Russian. These two letters, ru, together should be pronounced as /rʌ/.”

(MD-April-29)

In addition, given that she did not systematically learn English grammar knowledge in junior and senior high school, Ma consciously made up for this shortcoming to help her

improve her reading and writing skills in the TEM-4 exam. She explained that as part of her future plans as an English teacher in her hometown, Ma knew that her students would be English beginners. Therefore, her focus while still at the university was on learning more grammar knowledge so that she could help her future students prepare better for their exams. The following diary excerpt demonstrates Ma's plans.

"I didn't learn English phonetic this week, and my main energy was spent on English grammar knowledge. I went to Bilibili to learn some grammar knowledge, such as subjunctive mood, imperative sentences, and declarative sentences. At present, there is no need to learn English pronunciation because there are some written exams. Grammar knowledge can not only help me but also improve my future students' scores in written examinations, so I tend to put English pronunciation on the shelf."

(MD-April-17)

As a whole, based on the researcher's observation about her investment in and out of the classroom, her energy and time were on English vocabulary and grammar, which were crucial skills in the written examination. In terms of pronunciation learning, as she mentioned in the interview, it was Cinderella that can be ignored. She only looked up the pronunciation of unfamiliar words when she encountered them in the process of memorizing words and watching movies and documentaries.

4.2.15.2 Key Challenge

4.2.15.2.1 A poor learner in English pronunciation learning

Her English pronunciation investment was scarce as there were other factors holding back pronunciation investment besides her belief that pronunciation was Cinderella.

First, Ma found it difficult to learn English pronunciation. She was the only participant

who had never learned any phonetic knowledge before attending college. When I asked her about her impression of English pronunciation learning, she shrugged and said "*Bai Lan*", which is a Chinese phrase that meant she had given up any effort to improve her English pronunciation level. For her, learning English pronunciation was as difficult as climbing Mount Everest which she had no desire to conquer.

“Interviewer: Do you think you are good at learning English pronunciation?

Ma: No. In terms of the English phonetic knowledge you just mentioned, such as liaison and plosive, I just learned a little bit. The whole English phonetic knowledge system was too big. Then I didn't want to know about it out of laziness. I choose to escape from difficulties.”

(MIT1-848-851)

Especially, Ma did not know how to learn suprasegmental knowledge. Based on her past and current experiences learning English pronunciation, she had little opportunity to learn suprasegmental phonetic knowledge. Ma recalled that her English teachers in junior and senior high school were all elderly teachers whose pronunciation was not very good. Not only did the teacher fail to teach English phonetic knowledge during the instruction process, but they also told them that pronunciation was not important. Thus, she had no choice but to memorize word pronunciation with the homophonic method. Besides, even in the English phonetic course at the university, her teacher also just focused on segmental knowledge, with a few involving suprasegmental knowledge. As a result, she hardly had any suprasegmental knowledge or how to learn it.

“Interviewer: Were there other phonetic knowledge involved, such as liaison, weak form, and plosive, in your past and present English learning experiences?

Ma: English teachers in junior and senior high schools rarely mentioned English pronunciation learning. In the English phonetics courses, a few knowledge in this area had been involved. But it was only mentioned by the teacher in the last two

classes and did not elaborate. There was not enough time for us to practice. I remembered that the English phonetic symbols were tested in the final exam rather than these advanced English phonetic knowledge.”

(MIT1-647-673)

“Interviewer: Did you mean these strategies you just listed that were all used to help you learn the pronunciation of English words?

Ma: Correct. I didn't know how to learn other advanced English phonetic knowledge. Because my English teachers haven't taught me how to learn them, either.”

(MIT4-103-106)

4.2.15.2.2 Academic pressure

Secondly, Ma was overloaded with her academic work. As her English proficiency was weaker than that of other classmates, she would spend twice as much time completing her homework. Her teacher in junior high school told her that they could be relaxed after entering university. However, in college, she felt that nothing had changed and she was still exhausted by various homework assignments every day. Therefore, Ma just wanted to enjoy her leisure time out of class without any desire to learn English pronunciation anymore.

“Interviewer: What did you mean in terms of tired?

Ma: Every day, we have a lot of homework to complete. I feel very tired. I just wanted to take advantage of my spare time to rest and relax after a day of courses. Then I didn't want to learn English pronunciation.”

(MIT1-965-967)

4.2.16 Congruent between English pronunciation learning belief and investment

Ma was the only ethnic minority participant in this study who came from a remote part of the country with poor English resources. Although she admired the General American and Received Pronunciation, she felt intelligibility was enough for her to communicate

successfully with others. With regard to the status of English pronunciation, she admitted that it made a difference in listening and speaking, but she tended to ignore it in her daily learning. This is because in her past and current English learning experiences, the written examinations were most important and in these examinations were no mandatory tests for spoken English or English pronunciation. Moreover, her future plan is also one of the reasons that she ignores English pronunciation.

Ma's strategies to improve her English pronunciation included combining her limited direct and indirect phonetic learning experience, memorizing the pronunciation of words, and learning from teacher error correction. In practice, based on the researcher's observation, most of the time she focused on vocabulary and grammar to successfully pass English written examinations. She incidentally invested energy and time in learning pronunciation in the process of memorizing vocabulary and watching movies. Aside from the belief that English pronunciation can be ignored, other constraints discouraged her investment like difficulty in learning English pronunciation and a lack of knowledge to deal with supra-segmental knowledge as well as heavy academic load. To sum up, her beliefs were consistent with her investment in English phonetic learning.

4.2.17 Case Xi

Xi was the last participant I contacted in November 2021. I went to her *English listening and speaking* class to ask volunteers to participate in my research through a questionnaire. After I read her background information, I called her and invited her to have a walk around the campus. She agreed without much hesitation and kept our

appointment promptly. I had to say she was a pretty girl, as her snow-white skin and slender figure were pleasing to the eyes. When I started to tell her about my research topic, she showed great interest and shared her English pronunciation learning experiences.

When I felt she was willing to cooperate with my research, I shared my research schedule with her as well as inquired about classroom observation. Like other participants, Xi said that most of her English courses didn't involve English pronunciation learning. However, she was considerate enough to recommend me to the English Listening and Speaking class and said maybe some listening and speaking activities could be carried out. I followed her advice and managed to pick up some useful investment information in her classroom. At the same time, Xi was embarrassed to confess that she didn't learn English pronunciation after class, and wondered whether her data would be significant for my research or not. I calmed her down and told her to behave as she usually did. Finally, we had five interviews, two stimulated-recall interviews after *English listening and speaking* classroom observation, 10 diaries, and tons of documents.

Xi was born into a well-off family in the town of Deyang, Sichuan Province, where her parents ran a family business to support her and her younger sister's education. Since her parents had a stable economic income, Xi had no worries about food or clothing. At the same time, she did not experience the hardships of living, developing her casual and playful character. This was also the reason why her data collection process was slower

than other participants. Nonetheless, her flaws did not hide their merits. She was quite good at developing strengths and avoiding weaknesses. Unlike her classmates, who concentrated on learning with their full effort, Xi diverted her energy to do things she was interested in. For example, when entered university, she joined the students' union and singing and dancing department, aiming to cultivate her communication, organizational, and management abilities. During the summer vacation, she actively participated in the activities that college students volunteered to go to the countryside to teach and bring knowledge and warmth to schoolchildren in remote mountainous areas. She enjoyed her colorful campus life at the university and was concerned about the development of her comprehensive ability in various activities rather than sticking to book knowledge. From the researcher's observation, Xi's social involvement in the activities within the campus as well as outside made her more experienced, more mature, and more rational than her peers. She was able to obtain more helpful information to compare, analyze, and make decisions instead of indulging in unrealistic fantasies.

When talking about her reason for being an English major student, according to her English learning experiences in junior and senior high school, she thought English was the easiest subject to learn and was able to learn it well. Moreover, because of long-term immersing herself in the family business atmosphere, she showed interest in business affair and dreamed of being a businesswoman in her heart. Hence, it prompted her to choose a business in the English direction. However, her father persuaded her to be an English teacher, given that she, as a girl, would be laborious to do business. When I was interested in her future employment plans, she may follow her father's advice to be an

English teacher.

4.2.18 Xi's belief

4.2.18.1 English Pronunciation Learning Goal Belief

Dilemma between native-likeness and intelligibility

Talking about her English pronunciation learning goal, Xi was at a loss as she thought the General American (GA) and Received Pronunciation (RP) were her ideals, but in reality, only a few people could achieve them. I was curious about her hesitation and gave her some time and space for her to consider. After a few minutes of reflection during the interview, Xi came to the conclusion that the English language was just a tool and the most important thing was communication—making others understand. Hence, intelligibility was good enough. However, she didn't want to give up her ideals that sound like GA and RP. In her words, one was an unattainable ideal, and the other was a reality that she would be able to achieve. It seemed that there was a road for her to go, but she didn't know how to choose. She felt lost about her English pronunciation learning goals. To deeply understand why she was tormented by these two different English pronunciation learning goals, we still needed to look back on her past and present English learning experiences in her formal schooling days.

“Interviewer: What is your English pronunciation learning goal?

Xi: I haven't thought about it yet. No goals. I haven't thought about this issue alone. I have a preferred accent in my heart, but I couldn't achieve it in the actual practice.”

(XIT1-1451-1455)

Xi was born and educated in Deyang, which was a relatively advanced city in terms of

education in Sichuan. She started to learn English in the third grade of primary school. Since then, Xi has been exposed to RP and GA. That is, all the English learning and teaching materials inside and outside the classroom were occupied by these two English accents. Due to the long-term subtle effect, she subconsciously believed that these two English accents were classics and that they were good examples to learn. Moreover, in senior high school, her experience listening to other English accents during class recess further led her to believe that English with other accents sounded bad compared to GA and RP, with her personal preference being GA.

“Interviewer: Are you exposed to British and American English pronunciation?

Xi: In the classroom from junior and senior high school, these two English accents are most exposed. I remembered that my senior high school English teacher occasionally played the TED during recess.

Interviewer: Why did your teacher play TED?

Xi: Maybe to relax. She chose different English accents, such as Australian English, Nigerian English, Canadian English, Mexican English, Singapore English, and Indian English. Anyway, those accents were from other countries rather than the classic accents, like American and British accents.

Interviewer: What do you think of these English accents?

Xi: I don't like them. They don't sound very good. Besides, General American is the best.”

(XIT1-626-635)

Besides the long-term and subtle influence of junior and senior high school made her feel that GA and RP sounded better, the English pronunciation teacher in college also played a crucial role, strengthening the standard status of these two English accents in her mind. Xi mentioned that the teacher who was responsible for the 8-week English phonetic course and the *Comprehensive English* course in the freshman year put English pronunciation accuracy first. To help them figure out the correct articulation manner and

place, the teacher invested a lot of time and effort in correcting their pronunciation errors in the English oral presentation activities. If they had the same wrong pronunciation habits, they would be punished by the teacher.

“Interviewer: What did your English phonetic teacher focus on in the class?

Xi: She liked to emphasize the mouth shape. In fact, what she emphasized the most was whether our mouth shape and tongue position were correct or not.

Interviewer: Do you mean she cared about accuracy?

Xi: Yeah. Follow with the tape to imitate the tone and intonation. If you didn't do it right, she would throw your book away and ask us to stand up.”

(XIT1-351-353)

Hence, Xi hoped to achieve standard English pronunciation like General American. During her freshmen year, Xi followed her English phonetic teacher's guidance and tried her best to listen to the audio and video, mark pauses, liaison, and rising and falling tones, then imitate and compare with the original audio to identify her pronunciation problems. To her disappointment, she found that she was not able to improve and attain the GA that she hoped for despite her efforts. After many attempts, her self-confidence and interest in English phonetic learning began to dwindle as she found herself not making any progress in achieving her learning goals.

“Interviewer: Do you want to own GA or RP?

Xi: You know, everyone probably had a preference for an English accent. I enjoyed the General American. It was a symbol of freedom and enthusiasm. I am an English major, and I admire people who can speak a standard General American. It is a reflection of comprehensive ability.

Interviewer: Okay, do you think it was important to have a General American English pronunciation?

Xi: In my freshman year, I intentionally tried to imitate following the audio and video. However, in practice, it was not a nice experience and hurt my self-

confidence. It was difficult to achieve in practice.”

(XIT1-658-664)

However, when the freshman English phonetic course ended and there was no more supervision from her teachers, Xi began to relax and did not force herself to pursue General American English pronunciation. This was further compounded when the Business English teachers told the students that English was just a tool for communication and that they should minor in another subject to make a living in the future. The teacher’s suggestions coupled with her frustrating experiences in not achieving the GA pronunciation, finally drove her to accept her imperfect English pronunciation. She also realized that having the standard GA and RP was just like having the icing on the cake without much practical significance other than winning the praise of others. Consequently, she transferred her energy to her ability to express her views fluently even without her initial desire of achieving GA or RP.

“Xi: Our business English teacher suggested that we minor in other subjects in the future to make a living. He suggested that English was just a tool and medium for communication. There was no need to pursue standard GA or RP, as long as the spoken English can be understood by listeners.

Interviewer: Did you agree with him?

Xi: I think what he said makes sense.”

(XIT3-252-257)

Seeing her change in attitude towards standard English pronunciation made me curious about her English pronunciation learning goals. I asked her if she was no longer obsessed with standard English pronunciation and if she accepted spoken English with an accent. She was deep in thought and said that standard pronunciation, such as GA or

RP, was one of the elements of the comprehensive quality of English majors. If she treated intelligibility as her English pronunciation learning goal, she would feel sorry for her identity as an English major student. However, in practice, Xi did feel the pain and frustration of adhering to standards. Hence, she became paradoxical due to her beliefs about the English pronunciation learning goal.

“Interviewer: What you just said was that you wanted to own a General American English pronunciation, but it didn’t matter if you couldn’t. You were concerned with whether people could understand. What was your pronunciation learning goal?

Xi: Intelligibility was important.

Interviewer: Okay.

Xi: But if I can make it better, I still want to get closer to the standard one.

Interviewer: What standard did you refer to?

Xi: I dreamed of having a standard General American English pronunciation, but in reality, I found it difficult to achieve, so the intelligibility was also acceptable. However, as an English major student, I still preferred the standard one. Maybe I don't know what my English pronunciation learning goals are either.”

(XIT1-676-684)

From the above analysis, her early experiences and exposure to the GA and RP as well as her English major student identity made Xi treat the two English accents as models to follow and learn. However, in practice, Xi experienced pain in achieving the standard English pronunciation. Hence, in the face of English pronunciation learning goal belief, she fell into a contradictory state.

4.2.18.2 The Importance of English Pronunciation Learning Belief

Cultural capital

In terms of the importance of learning English pronunciation, Xi admitted that she was

busy preparing for written exams before university and didn't pay much attention to learning English pronunciation. It wasn't until she took an English phonetic course in freshman year that she began to realize that English pronunciation, like other micro-skills, was an integral part of English learning and would affect her English scores in the examination. According to Xi, the English listening score accounted for one-fifth of the total scores in the examinations such as the senior high school entrance and college entrance examinations. Moreover, the proportion of listening scores in TEM-4 and TEM-8 increased to one-third. As an exam-oriented student, she realized that if she was poor in English pronunciation learning, she would not get the correct answer in the listening part and would risk failing these exams.

“Interviewer: How do you view the role of English pronunciation in English learning?”

Xi: Before college, it was all about written exams, and I didn't pay much attention to pronunciation. But Ms. Dong, who took the English pronunciation course in my freshman year, really changed our cognition of English pronunciation. She made me realize that English pronunciation was about listening and speaking.

Interviewer: How do you think it plays a role in terms of examination?

Xi: Generally speaking, it was important as it was related to the English listening test, which accounted for a large proportion of the total score of the examination, like TEM4 and TEM8. If your pronunciation was not good, the chances of failing would rise.”

(XIT1-594-598)

In addition, influenced by teachers in the field of Business English, she believed that the essence of English learning was communication, and understandable English pronunciation was a prerequisite for successful communication. Xi expressed that, despite the fact that there was no need to speak the same as the native speakers, intelligible pronunciation was essential. If the learners whose pronunciation did not

reach the intelligible level, their communication would be a big problem.

“Xi: Moreover, I agreed with the business English teacher's idea that English was for communication. If we hoped to communicate effectively, it was necessary to learn English pronunciation well.

Interviewer: You mean the English pronunciation was significant for listening and speaking?

Xi: Yeah. At least our English pronunciation should make others understand. Otherwise, daily communication would be a big problem.”

(XIT1-585-590)

Xi wrote the following in her dairy related to the importance of English pronunciation for daily communication;

“Pronunciation was very important and the basis of English learning, especially for beginners. If they did not master pronunciation well, their listening and speaking would be a big problem.”

(XD-10-12-April-10)

Imagined identity as an English teacher

Xi said when English majors apply for jobs or introduce themselves in the future, employers will judge potential employees based on their English pronunciation skills. If their English pronunciation is not good enough, they will leave a bad impression on the employer and will most likely be rejected.

“Xi: I think English pronunciation is important. It will affect our job hunting.

Interviewer: Can you talk about it in detail?

Xi: For example, when you were in a job interview, your pronunciation would determine people's impression on you. People didn't know about your other things. Your English pronunciation is your face.

Interviewer: okay.

Xi: They would judge your English proficiency by your English

pronunciation.”

(XIT3-244-252)

Since she initiated the conversation regarding the connection between employment and English pronunciation, I seized the chance to inquire about her future career goals. Xi said that despite being a business English student, her father considered it would be too hardship for a woman to engage in business affairs and persuaded her to become a teacher. After a careful consideration, she has decided to follow her father’s advice to be an English teacher rather than follow in his footsteps to be in the business world. This imagined identity gave her a sense of responsibility that she should be a role model for her students. Based on her own learning experience when learning pronunciation, she believed that a good English teacher should lay a strong foundation for her students to learn English pronunciation. Xi mentioned her English pronunciation learning had been most deeply influenced by the English teacher in junior high school and the English phonetic teacher at the university. The former teacher was her enlightenment teacher of English pronunciation, who shaped her English pronunciation habits, and the latter teacher professionally explained the articulation of manner and place, increasing her English phonetic knowledge. Hence, she thought learners’ English pronunciation proficiency was directly influenced by English teachers, and teachers should try to be an example for learners.

“Interviewer: How do you think your future employment will affect pronunciation learning?

Xi: I am a business English student. For me, there is more than one road to choose from. One choice is to be an English teacher, and another choice is to enter a foreign company. If I became a clerk in the company, it would not be very

demanding about pronunciation as long as others could understand me. However, it would be another matter if I were an English teacher. If I were a teacher, I would have to learn English pronunciation well. I couldn't hand over the wrong or bad pronunciation to the students, which would have a negative influence on them. It will be very serious in his whole learning journey."

(XIT2-30-36)

In short, according to her previous formal and informal learning experiences, Xi thought English pronunciation was the face of an English major student and significant for examination, communication, and identity construction as an English teacher in the future.

4.2.18.3 The belief of English pronunciation learning strategy

Based on her personal pronunciation learning experiences, Xi mentioned imitation, teacher correction, and general oral communication were good pronunciation learning strategies.

Cognitive strategies

In junior high school, Xi started to learn English. Since then, imitation has been her main way to learn English pronunciation. She recalled that in the six years of primary and secondary school, there were no direct English pronunciation learning activities involved. Most of the time no matter in and out of the classroom, she read after her teacher or tape to get to know the pronunciation of English words, sentences, and texts. This imitation idea to improve her English pronunciation was confirmed at the university, as her English phonetic teacher told them to listen and imitate more. Thus, in

her freshman year, she did a lot of imitation exercises with the help of English learning software such as *Liulishuo*, *Speexx*, and *Ximalaya*. When I asked in detail about the process of her imitation, Xi said she would first listen to the audio, then mark the phonetic and phonological knowledge such as liaison, intonation, pause, and stress, then repeat as she listened, and finally do the shadow reading.

“Interviewer: How do you learn English pronunciation in your daily life?

Xi: Imitation. During junior and senior high school, I often followed my teacher or the tape to read. There are no other ways. At university, our English phonetic teacher also told us to imitate. Generally speaking, I would listen to audio and get to know how to read first, then read, and finally read with it together.

Interviewer: Do you mean the shadow reading?

Xi: Yeah, shadow reading. I would preview the texts, then listen and follow to draw the stress, tones, intonation, and liaison. Wait for one or two seconds later; I will follow along to read.”

(XIT4-126-134)

In her dairy, she wrote;

“Sometimes when I watched the video on the internet, I couldn’t help imitating the sentences, paying attention to intonation and tone.”

(XD-13-14-April-17)

Social strategy

In addition to imitation, Xi thought teacher error correction was the most effective way to improve English pronunciation. This idea came from her first-year English pronunciation learning experiences at university. Her teacher in charge of the English phonetic course and the Comprehensive English course was very strict with their pronunciation. As long as there were English pronunciation-related activities in the classroom, such as news broadcasts, oral summaries of texts, and reading the texts aloud,

the teacher would correct students' pronunciation. Xi explained that if she only relied on her own imitation, she may not know if she had correctly pronounced the word nor would she know what her problem was. On the contrary, when an error is made, the teacher would give feedback about her pronunciation, which would immediately help her to correct her mispronunciation habits.

“Xi: I thought the correction from the teacher method was the best one. Because even if I tried to learn by myself, I didn't know what my problems were. If I didn't know what my mistakes were, I would always be in the wrong circle. I couldn't make progress. I think that I need someone to point out my English pronunciation mistakes, and then I can correct them. This was useful for learning.

Interviewer: Just as Ms. Dong did?

Xi: Yes. She influenced all of us deeply. You know, the whole freshman year, all of my classmates, including myself, previewed each text and listened to the audio, marking the phonetic knowledge before her course. She was very strict with our pronunciation and was willing to correct us in oral summaries and news broadcasts activities.”

(XIT5-40-49)

Another social strategy that Xi mentioned was communication. Xi was an active and lively girl who liked to socialize. Since junior high school, she has enjoyed participating in interactive activities in class, from which she has realized that communication could give her more confidence and improve her pronunciation fluency. She believed that only in a real communication context could it truly reflect the English pronunciation proficiency of learners and highlight their pronunciation problems. If learners just learn a lot of theoretical knowledge without applying it in reality, it is useless for their pronunciation learning.

“Interviewer: How do you think of communication to improve your English

pronunciation learning?

Xi: Well, we can be influenced by our partner's imperceptibly, and we may follow our partners' English tone and intonation. That is, when we communicated with each other, our English logic got better, and our fluency increased as well. In fact, our English pronunciation proficiency is not as good as we imagined. We will find out what problems we have only after we speak in practice. That is, it's only when we communicate in real life that it represents our true abilities, not what we think in our minds."

(XIT5-55-65)

This communication strategy was confirmed based on the researcher's classroom observation. When there were discussion activities, Xi was always actively talking with her partners or her teacher. Similarly, in her diary, she wrote like this:

"In my English listening and speaking class, I discussed with my partner and shared my ideas to about the advantage of shopping online. I hoped it can cultivate my English sense and increased my confidence in the conversation."

(XD-19-20-April-3)

According to the above analysis, with her own direct English pronunciation learning experiences, Xi shared three English pronunciation learning strategies, such as imitation, correction from the teacher, and oral communication, to improve her English pronunciation.

4.2.19 Xi's Investment

Based on the second research question that seeks to investigate Xi's investment in English pronunciation learning, the following question guided the discussion:

2.How do English major students in China invest in their English pronunciation learning?

Even though Xi believed that English pronunciation could help her improve her

communication skills, improve her listening scores, and construct an imagined identity, in practice, her effort and energy had never been invested in it. The findings were then given themes presented in the following sections. The themes that discussed Xi's pronunciation investment behaviors were "Incidental pronunciation learning", and "Key challenges".

4.2.19.1 Incidental Pronunciation Learning

The data from classroom observation and diary were used to describe Xi's investment behavior in English pronunciation learning. In brief, she did not care much about pronunciation learning at all, as the TEM-4 examination and preparation for the postgraduate examination were her major aims in the following two years of university. Most of the time, English pronunciation learning usually attracted her attention when she needed to understand the main idea of listening to texts and memorizing vocabulary. In the following section, the researcher vividly demonstrated how Xi constructed identity in the classroom to invest in English pronunciation. I went to her English listening and speaking class, which may involve English phonetic activities, to observe two times.

4.2.19.1.1 An occasional learner of English pronunciation in the classroom

Based on the researcher's observation of the English listening and speaking class, few pronunciation teaching activities were conducted. Most of the time, the teacher asked the students to do the listening and speaking exercises in textbooks. For example, the

teacher would ask the students to preview the listening tasks, listen to the video, fill in and check the answers, and then have an English oral discussion for about five to ten minutes. When asked whether she learned any English phonetics during these activities, Xi admitted that although she was very willing to communicate with teachers and classmates in this course, which will help improve fluency by the way, all her energy was spent on searching for answers to the questions and using the opportunity to express her opinions, rather than focusing on English pronunciation issues.

“Interviewer: How did you feel in the process of communicating with your teacher and classmates in the *English listening and speaking* class?

Xi: The teacher was nice to communicate with us and tried to figure out our opinions. At the same time, he was willing to share his ideas with us.

Interviewer: Did you think it was significant to improve English pronunciation?

Xi: It may help me speak with more fluency and be more confident. Nevertheless, I concentrated on exchanging ideas rather than English pronunciation, as I appreciated various views from the teacher and classmates.”

(XELSSIT1-290-303)

4.1.19.1.2 An examination machine out of the classroom

To know English pronunciation learning behaviors out of classroom, I transferred my attention to analyzing data from her diary. There was not much direct English pronunciation learning data either. In general, when Xi memorized vocabulary, did dictation exercises, and watched entertaining videos on the internet, she at most learned English pronunciation incidentally. She explained that this was the second semester of her sophomore year. The TEM-4 examination was around the corner. For English major students, there were just two times to take this exam that was with a certain difficulty. In addition, according to their foreign language school policy, if they fail, they cannot

obtain bachelor's degree certificates and bachelor's graduation certificates. Thus, out of the classroom, all her spare learning time was attached to the TEM-4 examination.

“Interviewer: How do you evaluate your English pronunciation learning behaviors outside of the classroom?”

Xi: I don't think I have learned English pronunciation at the current stage because my energy isn't on pronunciation at all. My aims are the TEM-4 and TEM-8 examinations. As for English pronunciation, I don't intentionally learn it. For example, when I want to memorize vocabulary for TEM-4, I will learn the pronunciation of words by the way. In my view, only the correct pronunciation of words can help me understand the listening exercises.”

(XDIT5-118-125)

Based on her long-year English examination experiences, she thought vocabulary was the most important factor influencing her written examinations because the English words were usually polysemy. If she only knew part of the meaning of a word, she tended to misunderstand the article during the exam. Therefore, each day she deliberately insisted on reciting the high-frequency vocabulary in the TEM-4 with the app named *BuBeiDanCi*, concentrating her effort on the meaning and usage of English words. In the diary, she recorded her English pronunciation learning like this;

“During May Day, I learned the pronunciation by memorizing words, such as soliloquy / sə'li:ləkwɪ/ n. vicious / 'vi:fəs / adj. In this process, I paid more attention to the spelling and meaning of words. The pronunciation learning was incidental. The reason for learning pronunciation was to know the pronunciation of English words. I did not deliberately learn pronunciation..”

(XD-1-5-May-8)

In addition, when Xi performed the dictation exercise that was also a part of TEM-4, she was likely to repeatedly listen to the parts that were not clear, look for the phonetic

symbols of unfamiliar English words in the dictionary, and finally do the shadow reading. When asked whether she would make some marks to help in the process of shadow reading, Xi replied that her main focus was to understand the main idea of the listening texts rather than English phonetic knowledge, adding that at most it may be possible to improve her fluency through the shadow reading. In the diary, she described her learning behavior in detail as follows;

“In the practice of dictation after class, I did as usual. I tried to write down what I had heard from the audio, compared my answer with the original texts, looked for the phonetic symbol of the wrong words, and then listened to it repeatedly until I completely understood the whole text. Finally, listened to it again and did the shadow reading. For example, “they prefer books that give step-by-step instructions on how to repair things like plumbing and electrical wiring or how to redecorate or enlarge a house.” I felt it was so difficult to understand the word plumbing/’plamɪŋ/. I looked at its phonetic symbol in the dictionary.”

(XD-14-18-May-22)

Furthermore, when she was free, she liked to choose TED videos such as *The Healing Power of Reading and take things easy* to relax based on her own interests and hobbies. In the process, she not only appreciated the standard General American and Received Pronunciation English accents, but also listened to and accepted the positive viewpoints conveyed in the video. When she felt the English speakers’ pronunciation was very pleasant, Xi couldn’t help but imitate the tone and intonation.

“Sometimes, I would watch TED videos, such as *The Healing Power of Reading*, *“Taking things easy”* and other motivational speeches. If the speaker’s English pronunciation was very native, I thought it was a kind of enjoyment to listen to, and I would like to imitate them, such as intonation.”

(XD-18-20-April-17)

In summary, based on the data from inside and outside the class, Xi's English pronunciation learning behavior was very rare. At the current stage, she had no intention of improving her pronunciation learning skills and only occasionally learned English phonetic knowledge when she needed to remember words and grasp the main idea of the text.

4.2.19.2 Key Challenge

Although Xi understood the status of English pronunciation in English learning, her learning behaviors in and out of the classroom did not same with her English pronunciation learning beliefs. Based on the data from the interview, classroom observation, and diary, some factors could explain the conflicts between her beliefs and investment in terms of English pronunciation.

4.2.19.2.1 A poor learner in English pronunciation learning

First, she found it difficult to learn English pronunciation, which was one of the reasons she chose to avoid it. Xi believed that learning English pronunciation was hard-working and required long-term persistence to make progress. Combined with her own direct English learning experience, there were many difficulties with phonological knowledge that frustrated and disillusioned her. Although she tried her best to imitate, her learning results were not ideal. She gave up on the idea of tormenting herself to achieve the perfect English pronunciation for now, but be content that she could make others understand.

“Interviewer: Why not persist in learning English pronunciation?”

Xi: Actually, I've practiced. I imitated with audio during winter break during my freshman year. I felt it was very difficult. Even though I had been practicing for a long time, it didn't work. Then it made me depressed, and I lost my confidence. In the end, I chose to leave it alone.”

(XIT1-771-774)

Besides, Xi lacked systematic English phonetic knowledge. She complained that there was no systemic English pronunciation examination to test her English pronunciation proficiency and to give specific feedback on her problems with English pronunciation. Although there was an English pronunciation test at the end of the first semester of the freshman year, Xi thought it was too easy. She knew her pronunciation was not perfect, and there were some problems she needed to overcome. However, she felt lost as to where to start practicing and improving her English pronunciation. Xi hoped that the English pronunciation proficiency test could be as rigorous as TEM-4 and TEM-8, with content and standards to be assessed for each level. Then she could take the test to detect her pronunciation proficiency and demonstrate her English pronunciation problems, thus improve her English pronunciation learning.

“Xi: The English pronunciation learning is not systematic.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Xi: I don't think there was a standard, and there was no sound learning system.

Interviewer: How do you understand the standard?

Xi: For me, I think our foreign language school needs to set up a detailed pronunciation examination system. That is to say, English pronunciation examination should be divided into different levels like the TEM-4 and TEM-8. Each level must set relevant content and testing standards. It could help me confirm what problems with my pronunciation and give me guidance to improve.”

(XIT5-217-226)

4.2.19.2.2 Written examination culture

Secondly, English education in China was pre-occupied with written exams. As an undergraduate student, her biggest wish was to pass the English majors TEM-4 and TEM-8, as well as to be admitted as a graduate student in English education. All these exams had almost no requirement for correct pronunciation. Therefore, she just wanted to be a qualified English test-taker. As for English pronunciation, she thought it was neither urgent nor important at the current stage. Hence, she chose to ignore it. If she wanted to improve her English pronunciation proficiency, she might consider investing time and energy when she was a graduate student. In short, her English pronunciation learning investment was inhibited by the English written examinations.

“Interviewer: Did you mean giving up learning English pronunciation?

Xi: No. But at present, I would not go to learn.

Interviewer: why?

Xi: You know, I have to pass the TEM-4 and TEM-8. They are extremely important for English-majors in China. If I failed these exams, I would face big trouble when I looked for jobs in the future.

Interviewer: How about English pronunciation learning?

Xi: Maybe in my postgraduate period, I would spend time doing some corrections.”

(XDIT5-719-722)

4.2.19.2.3 Unfair power relations affect investment in the English pronunciation

She was afraid that her classmates would speak ill of her. Due to the influence of long-term exam-oriented education, few students around her were willing to communicate in English. Sometimes, when she took the initiative to talk in English, some classmates satirized her for deliberately showing off. Gradually, the desire to invest in second-

language communication activities to improve English pronunciation began to decrease as well.

“Interviewer: You mention that it is because of the environment that you rarely communicate with each other in your daily life. Can you particularly talk about the environment?”

Xi: They are used to communicating in Chinese and are unwilling to break through their comfort zone to communicate in English. Sometimes, when I talked to them in English, hoping to practice English pronunciation fluency, they thought I was showing off and laughed at my Chinglish. Hence, I gave up trying to communicate in English with them.”

(XIT4-437-442)

4.2.19.2.4 Lack of English pronunciation-related courses

Xi said that since her sophomore year, her English teachers no longer emphasized English pronunciation but only lectured business knowledge. To make matters worse, *spoken English* courses taught by foreign teachers have also been canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the lack of pronunciation-related courses not only did she lose her enthusiasm for learning English pronunciation, but she also deprived of her learning opportunities to learn English pronunciation in the classroom.

“Xi: In the freshman year, when the English phonetics teacher emphasized it, I spent my time and energy on it. However, since sophomore year, teachers no longer focused on English pronunciation. Even the spoken English course taught by foreign teachers was canceled. The teachers focused on business English knowledge. I was a learner influenced by the external environment. Hence, I didn’t intentionally care about pronunciation learning.”

(XIT1-763-767)

In summary, Xi regarded English pronunciation as important to listening and speaking, but in reality, some factors were hindering her investment in English pronunciation

learning, such as ill words from classmates, difficulty in English pronunciation learning, a lack of courses related to English phonetics, and written examination culture.

4.2.20 In-congruent between English pronunciation learning belief and investment

Xi was the only participant whose belief was completely different from her investment in terms of English pronunciation learning. From elementary school through high school, she was immersed in General American and Received Pronunciation. Consequently, she regarded GA and RP as the standards. However, her experience of imitating GA at the university made her realize that the standard GA or RP was not easy to achieve. Hence, in the face of English pronunciation learning goal belief, she fell into a dilemma between native likeness and intelligibility. In the meanwhile, Xi cherished the role of pronunciation in communication, listening tests in examinations, and constructing an imagined identity as an English teacher. She believed that communication, teacher error correction, and imitation could improve her English pronunciation learning. However, in reality, her main energy and time were devoted to written examinations and vocabulary in and out of class. For example, when she memorized English words and did English dictation exercises, she incidentally learned English pronunciation. Xi cited the following reasons to explain why she did not focus on pronunciation learning at the current stage: Firstly, she found it difficult to learn English pronunciation. Secondly, there was a lack of courses related to English phonetics. Thirdly, English education was occupied with written exams. Fourthly, ill words from classmates.

4.3 The Cross-Case Analysis

The cross-case analysis discussed the patterns of similarities and differences across the five cases. The three sub-questions that describe the beliefs of these participants will be discussed and compared in terms of their learning goals, importance, and strategies for English pronunciation learning. Next, the beliefs of the participants would be matched based on their pronunciation learning investment in and out of the classroom. This led to the discussion of the final research question on the congruence between the beliefs of each participant and their investment.

Table 4.1 Summary of Comparison of Themes and Sub-themes Across Cases

Cases	Chen	Lan	Ping	Ma	Xi
Themes	Sub-themes				
Category 1: English pronunciation learning belief					
Learning Goal	1.Native-likeness	1.Intelligibility	1.Native-likeness	1.Intelligibility	1. Dilemma between native-likeness and intelligibility
Learning importance	1. Cultural capital 2. Social capital 3. Imagined community 4. Imagined identity	1.Cinderella	1. Cultural capital 2. Imagined identity	1.Cinderella	1.Cultural capital 2. Imagined identity
Learning strategy	1.Cognitive strategy 2.Social strategy 3.Meta-cognitive strategy 4. Affective strategy	1.Cognitive strategy 2.Compensation strategy 3.Social strategy	1.Cognitive strategy 2.Memory strategy 3.Social strategy	1.Memory strategy 2.Social strategy	1.Cognition strategy 2.Social strategy
Category2: English pronunciation learning investment					
Investment ways	1.Diverse investment	1.Incidental learning	1.Diverse investment	1.Incidental learning	1.Incidental learning

Investment content	1.Segmental feature 2.Supra-segmental features	1.Segmental features	1.Segmental features	1.Segmental features	1.Segmental features
Category 3: Congruent between English pronunciation learning belief and investment					
Belief-Practice Relationship	1.Congruent	1.Congruent	1.In-congruent	1.Congruent	1.In-congruent
Promoting factors	1. Imagined community 2. Imagined identity 3. Cultural capital 4. Social capital		1. Cultural capital 2. Imagined identity		
Key Challenges	1. Perceived difficulties in social relationship with exchange students 2. Unfair power relations affected investment in the foreign language	1. A poor learner in English phonetic knowledge 2. Perceived difficulties in establishing social relationship with advanced English speakers on campus	1.A poor learner in English phonetic supra-segmental knowledge 2.Written-examination culture 3.Perceived difficulties in establishing social relationships with exchange students on campus	1.A poor learner in English pronunciation 2.Academic pressure	1.A poor learner in English pronunciation learning 2.Written examination culture 3.Unfair power relations affected investment in English pronunciation learning 4.Lack of English pronunciation-related courses

4.3.1 The English Pronunciation Learning Goal Belief

Table 4.1 shows three features of English pronunciation learning goals. While Chen and Ping were supporters and defenders of “native-likeness”, Ma and Lan preferred

“intelligibility”. Xi, on the other hand, fell into the “dilemma between native-likeness and intelligibility”.

4.3.1.1 Native English Speaking (NES) versus English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

The reason is the native-speakerism ideology in formal schooling education. In their formal schooling experiences, both Chen and Ping have long been exposed to the General American (GA) and Received Pronunciation (RP). This explains why they were staunch defenders of native likeness in pronunciation learning. In China, the National English Curriculum(NEC) for English major students, which was issued in 2000 by the Ministry of Education(MoC), statements on phonology learning are more significantly affected by the StE ideology. As a result, in the context of teaching and learning English, both the teachers and learners believed that GA and RP were the best-accented speakers and served as role models.

Ma and Lan on the other hand, challenged the traditional monolithic model of English pronunciation learning and claimed their right to speak English with accents. In addition to the linguistic ideology taught in formal schooling, it must be recognized that social interactions and the use of tools have a substantial impact on students' attitudes on how to pronounce words in English. Influenced by their peers abroad, teachers, social media, and social with foreigners experiences, Ma and Lan came to the realization that accented English could be used for seamless communication and that speaking with GA or RP accents was unnecessary.

Furthermore, a learner's identity plays a crucial role in shaping their beliefs which cannot be disregarded. In this study, Chen and Ping believed that GA and RP are prerequisites for English majors. They will feel guilty about their identity if they give in to accented English. Similarly, intelligibility was most appropriate for Ma and Lan because they regarded themselves as ordinary students from ordinary families lacking material and symbolic resources.

Additionally, learners' beliefs about their learning objectives for English pronunciation are shaped by their personalities. The divergent personalities of Chen and Ma influenced their contrasting views on pronunciation learning objectives. Chen's pursuit of perfection rendered her intolerant to English with an accent. However, Ma with her muddle-along character thought that intelligibility was sufficient.

4.3.1.2 Dilemma between native-likeness and intelligibility

Xi's English pronunciation belief fell in dilemma between native-likeness and intelligibility, which showed her contradictory psychology. Due to the time-consuming English pronunciation acquisition process and the serious imbalance in the teacher-student ratio in China, English pronunciation learning and teaching are neglected by teachers in many cases. However, while ignoring English pronunciation, most teachers still insist on taking GA and RP as the teaching and learning goals, which to a certain extent aggravates the situation of English major students being ashamed to speak English and suffering from not achieving standards.

4.3.2 The Importance of English Pronunciation Learning Belief

In terms of the English pronunciation learning importance belief, from Table 4.1, Chen, Ping, and Xi thought that English pronunciation learning was important, while Lan and Ma felt that pronunciation was not important. There are several factors forming their distinct beliefs.

The first factor is the social and cultural capital. In Chen's case, the positive belief in learning English pronunciation comes from her personal English pronunciation learning experience in training institutions and traveling experiences in Hong Kong and Macao, China. These experiences saved her from falling prey to the existing formal social institutional practices like the ones her female counterparts had undergone and helped her believe that English pronunciation was beneficial to making quality friends and improving her English listening and speaking skills. However, Lan and Ma held negative English pronunciation learning belief due to all of their English learning revolved around the English written examination in their formal and informal schooling days. This is also the reason why Ping and Xi do not pay attention to English pronunciation learning in the early learning stage. It was not until they were exposed to English pronunciation learning in their freshman year that they established a positive belief in pronunciation learning and believe it could help them improve English listening and speaking skills.

The second factor is one's imagined identity and community. Chen, Ping, and Xi wanted to work either in English-related careers like blogging or teaching, or they wanted to join imagined groups centered around the language. As a result, they acknowledged the importance of pronunciation in learning English. Lan and Ma, however, had no intention of working in English-related work. Ma wants to work as an English teacher in her hometown without having to speak the language well. Lan also did not harbor any wish to work in the English-speaking field. As a result, they assumed that pronouncing words correctly in English was unimportant.

4.3.3 The English Pronunciation Learning Strategy Belief

The following traits can be further observed from Table 4.1. First, all five individuals shared similar opinions about how to develop English pronunciation. They all thought that social techniques, such as correcting teachers' mistakes could help students learn how to pronounce words correctly in English. In addition, excluding Ma, all four participants thought that social and cognitive techniques, such as conversation and imitation, could help them pronounce words more accurately in English. Furthermore, Ping and Ma stated that remembering word pronunciation by heart was a useful memory technique for their English pronunciation acquisition.

Secondly, although there were similarities among English pronunciation learning strategy beliefs, there were differences. Chen had the most diverse types of beliefs in English pronunciation learning strategies. For example, she mentioned four types of

English pronunciation learning strategies: cognitive strategy, social strategy, metacognitive strategy, and affective strategy. This may be because Chen's pronunciation learning experience was much richer, including not only English pronunciation learning experience in formal schools but also a learning experience in extracurricular training institutions and travel, independent online learning, etc.

Thirdly, Chen's English pronunciation learning strategy beliefs are more effective. She was the only participant who believed that meta-cognitive strategies could improve English phonetic learning and was able to clearly explain how to take advantage of communication to help her overcome English pronunciation difficulties. The reason may be that as a high-level learner, she was more cognizant of their pronunciation problems.

4.3.4 The Investment in English Pronunciation Learning

Based on Table 4.1, there were differences in the participants' investment in English pronunciation learning. Firstly, only Chen and Ping positively invested in English pronunciation learning with different strategies to improve their English pronunciation proficiency. The other three participants Lan, Ma, and Xi, just incidentally learned English pronunciation in the process of preparing for the TEM-4 examination and learning the skills related to this examination. Secondly, in terms of English pronunciation learning content, Chen was the only participant who invested her energy and effort in both segmental and suprasegmental knowledge. The other four participants

just focused on segmental features, either actively, like Ping, or incidentally, like Lan, Ma, and Xi. There are three key factors influence their different investment in English pronunciation learning. In the following sections, the researcher will describe them in detail.

4.3.4.1 Imagined community and identities influence learners' investment in English pronunciation learning

Chen, Ping, and Xi thought English pronunciation could help them enter the imagined communities or realize their imagined identities. However, regarding the status of English pronunciation, Ma and Lan had opposite views. Unlike Chen who was interested in European and American social circles, Ma and Lan showed little enthusiasm for English-speaking communities. Furthermore, neither of them believed that English pronunciation has much to do with the work they want to engage or the one they want to become in the future. As a result, Ma and Lan no matter in and out of class, they didn't construct any positive learners' identities to invest in pronunciation. At most of time, they only occasionally acquired English pronunciation knowledge like vowels, consonants, or sounds of words when they thought it was helpful for them to memorize vocabulary, reading exercises and grammar. For example, Lan as an occasional learner in the class picked up phonetic knowledge when her English listening and speaking teacher did pronunciation error correction. Out of class, she was like an examination machine who invested her energy and time in the TEM-4 examination by accumulating vocabulary, learning grammar structures, and practicing reading exercises. Similar to Lan, Ma as an examination machine who focused on written examinations by

memorizing in vocabulary and grammar out of the class, and as a passive learner who followed the teacher's instruction arrangement in the class.

4.3.4.2 Material and symbolic resources influence learners' investment in English pronunciation learning

The three participants, Chen, Ping, and Xi, seem to have different levels of investment in English pronunciation, despite their belief that it can help them acquire social and cultural capital. Social capital includes things like gaining recognition from celebrities and teachers. Cultural capital refers to improving their listening and speaking skills in English. For example, unlike Chen invested both in segmental and suprasegmental features, Ping just focused on segmental features because it was sufficient for her to make successful communication. Meanwhile, she didn't invest in suprasegmental features as she believed that it was not useful for her to get high score in the written-examinations. In terms of Xi, she didn't invest in English pronunciation because she thought English pronunciation at this point in her education was not significant for her to pass written examinations like TEM-4 and TEM-8. She intended to postpone investing in English pronunciation until graduate school, when the benefits of investment in English pronunciation would be immediate.

Unlike the Chen, Ping and Xi who hold positive English pronunciation learning beliefs, Ma and Lan both believed that English pronunciation was like a Cinderella that could be ignored in their English learning. Thus, they did not construct positive English pronunciation learning identities to invest in pronunciation either in or out of class. For instance, Lan as an occasional learner in the class picked up phonetic knowledge when

her teacher did English pronunciation error correction. Out of class, she was like an examination machine who invested her energy and time in the TEM-4 examination by accumulating vocabulary, learning grammar structures, and practicing reading exercises. Similar to Lan, Ma as an examination machine who prepared for written examinations by memorizing in vocabulary and grammar out of the class and a passive learner who followed teacher's instruction arrangement in the class.

4.3.4.3 Identity construction influences learners' investment in English pronunciation learning

The different identity constructions negotiated inside and outside the classroom have led to their distinct English pronunciation learning investment traces. Chen, Ping, and Xi all believe that English pronunciation not only helps realize their imagined identities, enter imagined communities, but also assist them acquire symbolic capital. However, in practice only Chen and Ping made an investment in English pronunciation, while participant Xi learned it incidentally. Participant Chen used her own agency to construct various positive English pronunciation learner identities in different learning scenarios and learning activities. For example, she took on the roles of a little teacher in the spoken English class to correct her classmates' phonetic error and a model learner in the English listening and speaking class to read the weak and strong forms in the sentences, read after the audio, as well as a humble learner to imitate the teacher's pronunciation, discuss with classmates, and seek suggestions from the teacher regarding her English pronunciation difficulties like liaison, linking, and weak and strong form. In addition, Chen, a self-motivated student, practiced segmental and suprasegmental English

phonetic knowledge outside of the classroom by obtaining phonetic knowledge online, singing songs, doing shadow reading, and performing dubbing activities to learn word stress, intonation, and punctuation.

Similar but not the same as participant Chen, Ping was likely to be a receiver from the teacher in the class. She tended to be quiet in the classroom and seldom raised her hand to answer the teacher's questions. However, when her teacher in charge of the Tourism English class corrected students' pronunciation errors, Ping actively wrote down the suggestions gave by her teacher and imitated her teacher's pronunciation in a quiet voice. Besides, out of the classroom, Ping constructed herself as an autonomous segmental learner who persisted in doing the dictation exercises and reading after the VOA to cultivate her English sense. In addition, when she could not recognize unfamiliar English words, she would look up the sound of the words in the online dictionary and write down the phonetic symbols to remember. Moreover, she treated herself as a poor learner regarding supra-segmental features, concentrating only on word pronunciation and not pushing herself to acquire other supra-segmental phonetic knowledge.

However, although Xi recognized the role of English pronunciation in improving learners' listening and speaking skills as well as her imagined identity construction, she didn't construct positive English pronunciation learners to invest in English pronunciation learning like Chen and Ping in and out of classroom. For instance, because English listening and speaking classes were dominated by written knowledge

instruction, Xi positioned herself as an occasional learner of English pronunciation. She would gain sporadic English phonetic knowledge like vowels, consonants, or sounds of words during scarce topic-discussion activities or conversation practices. Out of class, she was like an examination machine that concentrated on the TEM-4 examination. Regarding English phonetic knowledge, she occasionally learned it when she memorized vocabulary, performed English dictation, and watched TED speeches.

4.3.4.4 Contextual factors influence learners' English pronunciation investment

All five students in this study experienced contextual factors that affected their investment in English pronunciation. First, learning the pronunciation of English is challenging. Ping, Ma, and Xi expressed dissatisfaction over their lack of understanding regarding suprasegmental knowledge. Second, the investment in English pronunciation was impacted by unequal power relations. Chen and Lan discovered offensive remarks made by peers. Third, there are not enough courses on English pronunciation that are available for students. Fourth is the academic pressure while the fifth factor was the perceived difficulty in making friends with foreign students on the university campus. There were insufficient advanced learners or exchange students to provide the right social relationships for English language improvement. Finally, the sixth factor is the culture of written exams focused on teaching English.

4.3.5 Congruence between the Beliefs of English Pronunciation Learning and Investment Behavior

In discussing the learners' beliefs, it is crucial to understand that cognitive processes were involved. This process was understood through discussion and investigation of the learners' learning experiences as well as their investment behaviors in and out of the classroom. The themes listed in Table 4.1 are derived from understanding the experiences of the learners and their investment behaviors in and out of the classroom. Thus, Table 4.1 presents the congruence between the beliefs and investment of the selected participants in the learning of English pronunciation.

In short, the five participants' beliefs and investments were related in three different ways. Chen had positive congruence between his beliefs and investments. Since it could provide her with monetary and symbolic resources, enable her to enter a community she had created, and help her create an imagined identity, she believed that pronunciation of English was vital. In practice, Chen made use of her preferred techniques to improve her English pronunciation despite some contextual limitations. Conversely, when it came to their belief and investment in learning how to pronounce words in English, Lan and Ma shown negative congruence. They both subconsciously disregarded English pronunciation, believing it to be unimportant to learning the language. Besides, influenced by personal and contextual factors, in practice, they did not adopt their preferred learning strategies to intentionally invest in pronunciation learning. Different from Chen, Ma and Lan, participants Ping and Xi's beliefs and investments were incongruent to a certain extent. For example, Ping valued the status of English

pronunciation in her English learning, but she just invested in the segmental features with the strategies that she believed would improve her English pronunciation. Even worse, despite Xi recognized the status of English pronunciation, she did not follow her belief to invest in English pronunciation. The main reasons attributed to their incongruence were that they tended to be victims of contextual constraints rather than take agentive power to resist.

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to explore the beliefs of selected learners on the learning of pronunciation and the nature of the relationship between their beliefs and their pronunciation learning investment. In this section the summaries of the problem, the methodology, and the key findings of the study are presented. This is followed by the conclusion and discussion on the findings, the contribution and implications for practice, and the recommendations for future studies.

5.1 Summaries of the Problem, Methodology, and the Key Findings of the Study

The exploration on learners' beliefs and investment in pronunciation learning in this study was guided by the following research questions: 1. What are the beliefs of English major students in China regarding their English pronunciation learning, specifically (a) their goal of learning pronunciation? (b) the importance of learning pronunciation? (c)

the strategies for learning pronunciation? 2. How do English major students in China invest in their English pronunciation learning? 3. How are English major students' pronunciation learning beliefs congruent with their investment in learning English pronunciation? To understand the relevance of the findings in this study, the previous findings in the literature related to this study as well as the theories used in this study will be discussed and compared. Thus, it will enhance the answers to the research questions through in-depth discussions.

In China, the English Syllabus for English Majors in Colleges and Universities (2000) required English major students to grasp English pronunciation, aiming to cultivate students' communication abilities. According to Duan and Cao (2007), most English major students' English pronunciation in China was not up to the requirements of the syllabus (2000) when they graduated. In fact, only a few students were good enough to pursue the same pronunciation as the native speakers. Thus, it was evident that the English pronunciation learning outcome of English major students was not ideal, and there were wide variations among them. Although there were many studies on English pronunciation of English majors from the perspective of individual difference factors, few studies explored the reasons for the unsatisfactory results and differences in pronunciation learning of English majors from the perspective of learners' beliefs and investments. This study filled this gap to understand their beliefs, investments, and how their beliefs about pronunciation learning influence their investments in English pronunciation learning.

To guide this study, some theoretical background knowledge of learners' beliefs and Norton's investment model were used. Learners' language learning beliefs had both cognitive, social, contextual, and cultural nature as they were based on learners' identity, personality, previous learning experiences (van Dijk, 1998; Pajares, 1992; Barcelos, 2003) and social interaction such as interactions with others (parents, friends, teachers, etc.), as well as the tools (media, textbooks, classroom activities, etc.) provided with/within those social environments (Barcelos, 2003; Kalaja, 1995; Gabillion, 2005). This study adopted these elements to help understand how English major students' English pronunciation learning beliefs form. To comprehensively interpret learners' English pronunciation learning investment within an EFL context, this study drew on Darwin and Norton's (2015) investment model as a guide. Employing a multiple-case study, the data collection techniques of this study included interviews, observations, diaries, and document analysis. The analysis of the collected data was accomplished with the help of NVivo 12. The organization and method of analysis were done based on the standard procedure of coding and categorizing to allow the emergence of themes with the support of an audit trail.

The findings of the current study were organized into themes that answered the research questions. Each participant's case was analyzed separately in the within-case study and then compared in the cross-case analyses. The analyses revealed the participants' beliefs about pronunciation learning. Themes that described their beliefs about pronunciation learning emerged, as shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: English major students' English pronunciation learning belief

Participant	Learning Goal	Learning Importance	Learning Strategy
Chen	Native-likeness	Cultural capital Social capital Imagined community Imagined identity	Cognitive Strategy Social Strategy Metacognitive strategy Affective Strategy
Lan	Intelligibility	Cinderella	Cognitive Strategy Social Strategy Metacognitive Strategy Affective Strategy
Ping	Native-likeness	Cultural capital Imagined identity	Cognitive Strategy Memory Strategy Social Strategies
Ma	Intelligibility	Cinderella	Memory Strategy Social Strategy
Xi	Dilemma between native-likeness and intelligibility	Cultural capital Imagined identity	Cognition Strategy Social Strategy

In answering the first part of the first research question, this study finds that the English pronunciation learning goal belief revealed three features: native-likeness (Chen, Ping), intelligibility (Lan, and Ma), as well as the dilemma between native-likeness and intelligibility (Xi). Their individual previous English pronunciation learning experiences, identity as an English major student, and personality shaped their different English pronunciation learning goals. There was a phenomenon that needed attention, despite the three different English learning goal beliefs presented, all five participants, Chen, Lan, Ping, Ma and Xi treated General American and Received Pronunciation as the standard to learn.

To answer the second part of the first research question in terms of their English

pronunciation learning importance, there were two different kinds of beliefs. Three participants, Chen, Ping and Xi believed English pronunciation was important as it was not only the face of an English major student but also contributed to achieving English listening scores, improving communication ability, constructing imagined identities, and entering an imagined community. However, two participants, Lan and Xi regarded English pronunciation as Cinderella without much significance for English learning. Both of them thought the other English skills like vocabulary and grammar were more important for the written examination and were more worthy of their attention. Besides, they also thought English pronunciation was of little value, either in her daily communication or in their future employment.

For the third part of the first research question regarding their learning strategies in English pronunciation, there were similarities as well as differences among the participants. All five participants believed that social strategies like communication and teacher error correction could improve their English pronunciation. The second popular English pronunciation learning strategy was the cognitive strategy of imitation and participation in practical pronunciation lessons, favored by participants Chen, Lan, Ping, and Xi. In addition, the memory strategy was also supported by the two participants, Ping and Ma. They liked to take advantage of phonetic symbols to memorize the pronunciation of English words. It was worth noting that Chen was the only participant who believed that meta-cognitive strategies and affective strategies could improve her English pronunciation learning. Similarly, Lan was the only one to argue that compensation strategies like the homophonic method and substituting approximate

sounds for correct pronunciation were beneficial for English pronunciation learning.

Next, in answering the second research question about how these participants invest in their pronunciation learning, two kinds of investments appear to emerge, as shown in Table 5.2. Two participants, Chen and Ping invested in English pronunciation learning. Chen took agentive power to invest in English pronunciation, including segmental and supra-segmental features, with various strategies as she believed that could improve her English pronunciation proficiency. Ping tended to persist in investing in segmental features with cognitive strategy and memory strategy. The other three participants, Lan, Ma, and Xi disinvested in English pronunciation or at most incidentally learned English pronunciation when it was necessary to understand the pronunciation of vocabulary and help them understand the meaning of texts.

Table 5.2: Learner Pronunciation Investment in and out of the Classroom

Cases	Chen	Lan	Ping	Ma	Xi
Category: English pronunciation learning investment					
Theme	Sub-themes				
Investment ways	Diverse investment	Diverse investment	Incidental learning	Incidental learning	Incidental learning
Investment content	Segmental and supra-segmental feature	Segmental feature	Segmental feature	Segmental feature	Segmental feature

Finally, to answer the third research question on the congruency between their learning beliefs and their investments, three groups are revealed that are summarized in Table 5.3; positive congruency, negative congruency and no congruency. Among the participants, Chen was the only one who demonstrated congruency between her beliefs and

investments in a positive way. She positively invested in English pronunciation as she believed that it was important for her to achieve material and symbolic resources. In contrast, Lan and Ma demonstrated a negative congruency between their beliefs and investments. Both of them disinvested in English pronunciation as they treated English pronunciation as Cinderella. The remaining two participants, Ping and Xi manifested incongruency compared to their beliefs regarding their investment. Despite the different congruencies displayed, all the participants faced some personal and contextual constraints that affect their English pronunciation investment behaviors.

Table 5.3: Learners' stated beliefs and observed investment in and out of the classroom

Participants	Learners' stated beliefs	Observed investment
	Native-likeness	Diverse investment
Chen	Cultural capital/ social capital/ imagined identity/ imagined community	Key challenge
	Cognitive strategy/social strategy/metacognitive strategy/ effective strategy	
	Intelligibility	Incidental learning;
Lan	Cinderella	Key challenge
	Cognitive strategy/social strategy/ compensation strategy	
	Native-likeness	Diverse investment;
Ping	Cultural capital/ imagined identity	Key challenge
	Cognitive strategy/social strategy/memory strategy	
	Intelligibility	Incidental learning;
Ma	Cinderella	Key challenge
	Social strategy/Memory strategy	

Xi	Dilemma between nativelikeness and intelligibility	Incidental learning;
	Cultural capital/ imagined identity	Key challenge
	Cognitive strategy and social strategy	

5.2 Key Findings and Discussion

Based on the findings, although the five participants revealed their individual beliefs and investments in terms of pronunciation learning in and out of the EFL classrooms, they can be categorized into three groups based on their beliefs-investments relationship. The first is positive congruency, demonstrated by Chen who believed in what she invested in and out of their classrooms. Second is negative congruency between what they believed in and what they invested in and out of their classrooms, as illustrated by Lan and Ma. The third, as shown by Ping and Xi, revealed that their beliefs were not in line with their investment, suggesting that some personal and contextual factors hindered the transfer of beliefs into investment in and out of the classroom. Out of the three groups, the negative congruency demonstrated by Lan and Ma was considered a serious issue because they both treated English pronunciation as a Cinderella. Since the participants were selected based on their academic backgrounds and English pronunciation proficiency, the findings from this study would bring a new focus to EFL learners' beliefs and investment in pronunciation learning, which were not highlighted in previous studies of learners' beliefs. The following section discusses the themes presented in Chapter 4 in greater detail.

5.2.1 Diverse English Pronunciation Learning Goal Beliefs

There were three different English pronunciation learning goal beliefs among the five participants: native-likeness and intelligibility as well as the dilemma between native-likeness and intelligibility. This research finding indicated that, on the one hand, in the EFL context of China, learners' English pronunciation learning goal beliefs no longer held General American (GA) or Received Pronunciation (RP) as the only standard but displayed diversity, which were confirmed in existing empirical studies (Xu & Fang, 2022; Liu & Fang, 2022; Pan et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2023; Wang & Fang, 2019; Huang & Hashim, 2021). For example, Huang and Hashim (2021) found that with the growing number of English varieties the Chinese English learners were exposed to, there were other options besides the standard English accents they preferred and aspired to have. In relation to this study, the intermediate and high-level proficiency participants Chen and Ping, preferred GA and RP and treated these two English accents as standards they attempted to achieve, concurring with other EFL studies (He & Miller, 2011; Evans, 2010; Gao & Lin, 2010; He & Li, 2009; Wang & Fang, 2019; Pan et al., 2021; Huang, 2020; Fang, 2020; Liu et al., 2023; Fang et al., 2023). However, the other two low-level proficiency participants, Ma and Lan held different English pronunciation learning beliefs. Even though they prefer GA and RP in their attitudes, both believed that the greatest function of language was communication and thought it was sufficient to achieve intelligible English pronunciation. This was consistent with other research findings in EFL contexts (Xu & Fang, 2022; Liu & Fang, 2022; Pan et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2023; Waniek-Klimczak, 2008; Tergujeff, 2013). Besides, it cannot be ignored that the findings revealed ambivalence in participants' beliefs about English pronunciation

learning goals. Participant Xi did not know what her pronunciation learning goal was and got lost between native-likeness and intelligibility.

Many factors contributed to the different beliefs in learning English pronunciation among five participants, one of which was the ideology of the English language learning. In China, according to the requirements of English education policy from primary school to university, the English audio-visual and listening materials used by English teachers in English classes are mainly GA and RP, which implicitly or explicitly convey to English learners that these two English accents are the standard and role model for learning. Related to current study, Chen and Ping's stereotyped reactions could be explained by the "standard native-speaker English language ideology in linguistics" (Jenkins, 2007, p. 32). Echoing with Tsuda 's (1997) argument that native speaker (NS) norms continue to colonize the minds of non-native speakers (NNSs), resulting in the ideological construct of NS linguistic superiority and NNS linguistic inferiority (Jenkins, 2007). Moreover, pedagogically speaking, Jenkins (2007) also stated that this ideological construct prevails in gate-keeping practices in ELT, including the field of pronunciation teaching in various parts of the world. Language learners are somehow conditioned mentally and behaviourally by practices of schooling to serve the dominant social institutions and groups. Just like Canagarajah (1999) demonstrated, the dominant social arrangement transmitted its values to schools; the school transmits these values to students through curriculum and teaching methods; the students adhere to the status quo of NS. That is, school policies, teacher guidance, and textbooks determine participants' perceptions of language in general, and pronunciation learning in

particular (Adreou & Galantomos, 2009; Jenkins, 2007).

Besides being related to learning experiences, social interactions with others like parents, friends, teachers, etc., as well as with tools like media, textbooks, classroom activities, etc. (Barcelos, 2003; Kalaja, 1995; Gabillion, 2005), are also important sources of belief formation. In current study, although the NS language ideology dominated the English education system during the formal schooling years of all participants, Lan accepted her English accent through communication with her German friends, guidance from cultural introduction course teachers, and influence from social media, to form an intelligible pronunciation learning goals belief. This finding echoes William et al.'s (2015) statement that while at a macro level, the country or educational culture can influence an individual's beliefs, at a micro level, aspects of the immediate situation such as curriculum, teachers and peers also play an important role in personal belief formation.

In addition, the learner's identity is an important factor that influences the learner's English pronunciation learning goal belief. Despite there are no specific studies that have investigated the relationship between beliefs and identities in applied linguistics, some researchers have hinted at or suggested this relationship in their work (Barcelos, 2015; Barcelos, 2000; Murphey, 1995; Oxford, 2008; Sakui & Gaies, 2003; Singh & Richards, 2006; Woods, 2003). As early as 2003, Woods had already stated that beliefs "seem to be intrinsically related to people's selves and identities (p. 225)". In relation to current study, the five participants goal beliefs are influenced by their identity. For example, In Chen's view, the GA is the symbol of an advanced English learner. Ping

and Xi said believed native-likeness in English pronunciation was one of the comprehensive abilities of English major students. Similarly, Ma believed that she was a poor English pronunciation learner and that rather than pursuing native-likeness English pronunciation, intelligibility would be more suitable for her. In addition, Lan not only said it is common for an English learner from an ordinary family with average talent to speak English with accent, but also claimed that English accents represent the different national identities around the world. Moreover, participants Ma and Lan's view received support from many researchers (Jenkins, 2007; Doerr & Kumagai, 2009; Munro & Derwing, 1999; Moyer, 1999; Baratta, 2016; Bhatia, 2018; Trofimovich & Turuševa, 2015; Huang, 2021). They have questioned the static, homogenous, depoliticized, and non-contextual principle that accents are inherently regarded as a bad thing and put in the place of treatment, intervention, and eradication in the same way as a language pathology. In fact, it turns out that only a small proportion of learners are truly motivated and can finally achieve native-like pronunciation (Moyer, 1999; Flege et al., 1995; Saito, 2011; Nguyễn, 2021; Saito, 2021). It indicates that native-speaker competence as the ultimate goal of English as second language learning is neither realizable nor desirable, but unrealistic and identity-threatening for most speakers, especially in terms of pronunciation (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994). Thus, tolerance for an intelligible accent supports the learners' potential desire to express their identity through their speech (Müller, 2013). Thus, it is clear that the five participants' different beliefs about English pronunciation learning goals are closely related to their self-constructed identities. This means that when "we perceive something, we perceive it as it relates to us (van Lier, 2004, p. 91)."

Furthermore, learners' personalities are also a factor that prompts them to form different English pronunciation goal beliefs that cannot be ignored (Ellis, 2008; Martínez Agudo, 2014; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996). In the current study, Chen and Ma had completely different personalities, which shaped their diverse beliefs about pronunciation learning goals. For instance, Chen, a high-level proficiency participant, had a perfectionist personality that made her intolerant of English accents other than Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA). However, as a low-level proficiency participant, Ma's muddle-along personality caused her to believe that intelligibility was sufficient.

At the same time, compared with the other four participants' English pronunciation learning beliefs, Xi's English pronunciation belief showed a contradictory psychology, which is not unrelated to the current situation of less attention to English pronunciation teaching but high standards in China. Consistent with Wang and Gao's (2015) statement, due to the time-consuming English pronunciation acquisition process and the serious imbalance in the teacher-student ratio in China, English pronunciation learning and teaching are neglected by teachers in many cases. However, while ignoring English pronunciation, most teachers still insist on taking Received Pronunciation and General American as the teaching and learning goals, which to a certain extent aggravates the situation of English major students being ashamed to speak English and suffering from not achieving standards. Xi's contradictory English language target learning beliefs undoubtedly provide a wake-up call for current Chinese English pronunciation

education teachers who must pay attention to learners' learning beliefs, otherwise it will easily cause students to fall into a state of confusion in English learning.

5.2.2 Intermediate and high-level proficiency participants held positive English pronunciation learning beliefs, while low-level proficiency participants had opposing ideas

In current study, high-level proficiency participant Chen and mid-level proficiency participants Ping and Xi believed that English pronunciation was very important. In their view, it can not only bring some symbolic material resources but also help them realize their imagined identity and enter their imagined community. These findings have been confirmed in other studies in EFL contexts (Phuong, 2019; Simon, 2005; Alghazo, 2015; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015; Nowacka, 2012; Nguyen & Hung, 2021). However, two low-level proficiency participants, Lan and Ma, believed that English pronunciation was not important. They viewed it as a negligible Cinderella, which was echoed in other studies in China (Xu, 2015; Ren, 2008). It was evident that there were significant differences in the English pronunciation learning importance beliefs among participants with different English pronunciation proficiency, which were mainly related to these reasons.

Firstly, learners' beliefs are also related to their individual formal and informal English pronunciation learning experiences, which play a critical role in shaping learners' English pronunciation importance beliefs (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2013). In Chen's case, although she was an English learner exposed to a rather non-communicative English

learning environment along with the other four participants, thanks to her personal English pronunciation learning experience in training institutions that emphasize learners' communicative ability as well as her communication experiences with foreigners in Hong Kong, Macao and Beijing , she held a positive belief in English pronunciation learning. These informal English pronunciation learning experiences saved her from falling prey to the existing formal social institutional practices like her female counterparts had undergone. In terms of the two low-level proficiency participants, Lan and Ma, they thought English pronunciation was negligible as no matter past or present their English learning revolved around the English written examination. This is also the reason why Ping and Xi did not attach importance to learning English pronunciation in the early stages of learning. Until they were exposed to English pronunciation learning in their freshman year, they all changed their negative concepts of pronunciation learning. As Ahmad Shah (2014) said, in a culture that saw examinations as an important way to measure a learner's ability, a component that was not included in the examination was abandoned. In other words, the importance of language skills was determined by the weight it carried in the examination. Thus, English learners expressed less concern over their English pronunciation skills as they were not tested on the examination.

Secondly, English learners' beliefs about the importance of English pronunciation are closely related to their imagined communities and identities. The current finding echoed some scholars' views that learners focus on improving their pronunciation may come from how they think their pronunciation will affect their membership in an imagined

community in the future (Trofimovich & Turuševa, 2015) or how their imagined identity requires pronunciation (Müller, 2011). In relation to current study, Chen, Ping, and Xi were preparing to enter English-related imagined communities to engage in English-related jobs such as English blogger or English teacher, etc. Therefore, they recognized the status of English pronunciation in English learning. However, Lan and Ma did not intend to take up English-related work. Even if they did, they would only choose positions with limited requirements for English pronunciation. To illustrate, Ma expressed that she would return to her hometown where the English pronunciation requirements for English teachers are not high and the instruction language can be mixed in Chinese and English. Similarly, Lan said that she would not consider becoming a primary school English teacher who is required with high standard for English pronunciation. Therefore, they consequently hold negative beliefs about the importance of learning English pronunciation.

5.2.3 The pronunciation learning strategy beliefs of high-level proficiency participants are more diverse and effective than those of intermediate and low-level proficiency participants

Studies have shown that there were differences in learning strategy beliefs held by participants with different language levels (Barcelos, 2003; Simon & Taverniers, 2011; Mercer, 2011; Mori, 1999). As a participant with high-level proficiency English pronunciation, Chen's English pronunciation learning strategy beliefs were more diverse than those of intermediate-and low-level participants like the other four participants, which is concurred with the findings from other studies (Zhao, 2015;

Eckstein, 2007). Chen mentioned four pronunciation learning strategy beliefs, including cognitive strategies, social strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, and affective strategies, whereas the other four low-to-moderate participants could only name at most three strategies to improve their pronunciation. It's possible that their disparate experiences with English learning account for their difference in learning strategy beliefs. Compared with other participants whose English pronunciation learning experience mainly came from formal schooling days, Chen's pronunciation learning experience was far more comprehensive, including an English pronunciation learning experience in formal schools and those learning experiences in extracurricular training institutions and travel, independent online learning, etc. At the same time, this also reflects that the other four participants' (Ping, Lan, Ma and Xi) past English learning experience rarely involved English pronunciation learning, resulting in few English learning strategies they knew (Peng, 2017; Zhang, 2018; Derwing, 2015).

What's more, Chen's strategy beliefs in English pronunciation learning were more effective than those of low and intermediate-level proficiency participants. On the one hand, Chen was the only participant who could clearly describe how to use communication strategy to help her overcome English pronunciation learning difficulties, which the other participants were not able to do. The social strategy like communication with native English speakers and advanced English learners was treated as a good English pronunciation learning technique by Chen, Ping, Xi and Lan. Similar finding was also confirmed in previous studies (Simon & Taverniers, 2011; Nowacka, 2012). Simon and Taverniers (2011) found that their EFL English major students

preferred naturalistic learning such as a communicative-based approach to acquire second language (L2) pronunciation. Likewise, Nowacka (2012) found that more than 50% of the university students who were a mix of Italian, Spanish, and Polish in his study thought contacts with native speakers were useful for learning English pronunciation. However, Ahmad Shah (2014) questioned the belief that pronunciation was best learned through exposure to authentic linguistic context as an effective way of learning. She argued that there is also the factor of the amount of time needed to determine how certain sounds are produced or connected. In addition, apart from the exposure, the crucial learning of pronunciation is the ability to speak and interact successfully in the language. In relation to current study, the views put forth by Ahmad Shah (2014) are strongly supported by the researcher. That is, even though four of five participants believed that communication was helpful to their pronunciation learning, only Chen (advanced participant) was clear on how to acquire specific pronunciation knowledge and overcome their own pronunciation difficulties through communication. The other three participants, Lan, Ping, and Xi were unable to specify how to acquire English phonetic knowledge through communication, but they assumed that communication can improve their fluency.

On the other hand, only Chen believed that the meta-cognitive strategy like monitoring and self-correction would help her learn English pronunciation. In contrast, intermediate and low-level learners like Ping and Lan preferred compensation and memory strategies (Guo, 2014; Lai, 2009). These results support the idea that the more proficient learners like Chen preferred meta-cognitive pronunciation learning strategies (PLS) as they were

more cognizant of their pronunciation problems (Szyszka, 2015; Hişmanoğlu, 2012; Rokoszevska, 2012; Pawlak, 2018).

5.2.4 Diverse investment versus Incidental learning

Based on observing their English pronunciation investment among five participants, two types of investment emerge diverse investment and incidental learning. The following will discuss the factors that shape two distinct investments in English pronunciation learning.

5.2.4.1 Imagined community and identity influence investment in English pronunciation learning

It is also important to point out the role of imagined community and imagined identity (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Sung, 2019; Wu, 2017; Wu & Jiang, 2024; Huang & Hashim, 2021; Kong & Kang, 2022) in Chen and Ping's sustained English pronunciation investments in a context where English is not a dominant language of communication. It seems inevitable that access to opportunities to speak English in a non-English-dominant society would be limited. For example, Chen and Ping's English pronunciation investments appeared to be restricted to a rather limited range of contexts, such as the university classroom and dormitory. Moreover, these communities where Ping and Chen could access English-speaking opportunities appear to be transient and transitory. They both perceived that there were few social activities in the classroom and the difficulties in establishing social relationships with advanced English speakers like

exchange students on campus, which could make continued L2 investments seem unprofitable, at least in the short run. It could therefore be argued that Chen and Ping's L2 identities constructed in a non-English-dominant society could be more fragile than the L2 identities developed by L2 learners in English-dominant contexts, where access to opportunities to speak the L2 is relatively easy and their L2 investments tend to lead to more immediate returns (Block, 2007; Norton, 2000). What is important to note here is that Chen and Ping's sustained L2 investments in a non-English-dominant context appear to rely heavily on the imagined identity they envisioned for the projected future, rather than on the short-term rewards in the immediate contexts. Chen, "through the power of imagination" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 241), envisioned being an English blogger and an English teacher who shares cultural differences between Eastern and Western countries. In a similar vein, Ping hoped to work in a university and become an English teacher with standard English pronunciation. In short, Ping and Chen's English pronunciation investments in and out of the classroom seem to have been driven by the prospect of gaining a good return in the long run, in terms of acquiring the kinds of cultural capital that would be necessary for access to the imagined community in the projected future. On the contrary, Lan and Ma did not think that English pronunciation has much to do with the work they want to engage or the people they want to become in the future, thus they were contented with being a passive learners in terms of their English pronunciation learning.

5.2.4.2 Social/cultural capital influence learners' strategic investment in English pronunciation.

Language learners invest in a target language to acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources and they expect to have a good return on that investment—the increased value of learners' cultural and social capital (Norton, 2000). For example, Chen aspired to have a high-quality relationship and be better at speaking and listening in English. Hence, she enthusiastically corrected her classmate's English phonetic errors, actively read the weak and strong forms in the sentence and asked for help from the teacher in the English listening and speaking class. Additionally, she continued to practice her English phonetic skills outside of the classroom using various techniques. In Ping's case, when her teacher in the Tourism English class rectified students' pronunciation errors, she took the initiative to write down her teacher's remarks. Outside of the classroom, she continued to read after the VOA and complete the dictation tasks, establishing herself as an autonomous segmental learner. However, even so, when faced with the English super-segmental phonetic knowledge that could not achieve the improvement even if she spent time and energy, Ping chose to give up. By the same token, Xi held positive beliefs toward English pronunciation, but she didn't invest in it. In her view, at the current learning stage, investment in English pronunciation couldn't bring immediate benefits to her academic achievement. Xi would like to invest in English pronunciation when she is pursuing graduate studies. Different like Chen, Ping and Xi who held positive English pronunciation learning belief, Ma and Lan chose to ignore English pronunciation as it neither could help them achieve high scores in the written examination nor bring benefits to their daily life. As a result, they made little

attempt or effort to learn how to pronounce words in or out of the classroom. For instance, in the class, Lan and Ma just treated themselves as examination machine who occasionally acquired limited English phonetic knowledge in and out of class. These findings here seem to resonate with previous scholars' argument that learners' strategic selections of investments in different L2-mediated practices could be shaped by the perceptions of whether specific investments would result in accumulating various forms of cultural and/or social capital, which would in turn impact on identity (re)construction (Bourdieu, 1991; Kanno, 2008; Norton, 2000, Babino & Stewart, 2019; Bea, 2013, 2014; Massó & De Costa, 2023) .

5.2.4.3 Learners' different identity constructions result in distinct investments in English pronunciation in and out of classroom

In tune with Norton's (2015) claim about the integral relationship between investment and identity, the analysis suggests that Chen, Ping and Xi's varying degrees of English pronunciation investments across contexts appear to be closely intertwined with the different identities they constructed in specific contexts. As evident in the analysis, Chen and Ping particularly invested in English pronunciation learning when desirable L2-mediated identities could be negotiated. For example, Chen likes to be a little teacher in the pair work and an active learner in topic discussion activities during the Spoken English class, a model learner in the English listening and speaking class, as well as a self-disciplined learner out of class to promote her investment in English pronunciation learning in order to achieve the symbolic and material resources and realized her imagined identities. Similar to Chen, Ping was willing to be a dedicated

learner to received guidance from her English translation teacher, who did the oral report activities. In addition, she continues being an active learner who reads aloud to acquire segmental features every Monday through Friday in the privacy of her dormitory. In contrast, even though Xi thought English pronunciation could bring symbolic and material resources, in practice, she didn't construct any positive identities to back up her investment in English pronunciation. Due to the written examination culture, Xi was more likely to be an occasional learner in the listening and speaking classes and an English written- examination machine outside of the classroom. She is also a passive learner due to the challenges faced with learning English pronunciation, a dearth of phonetics-related courses, and unkind words from her peers. Thus, the findings from this study can be interpreted as a continuation of earlier research (Gao et al., 2002; Teng, 2017a/b, 2018; Skapoulli, 2019; Vasilopoulos, 2015; Shi & Guo, 2021; Shahidzade & Mazdayasna, 2022), which found that identities are competitive, multi-framed, dynamic and fluid, and that levels of engagement with various L2 practices seem to be closely linked to the identities that individuals construct in particular contexts.

5.2.4.4 Contextual factors influence learners' agency power in English Pronunciation learning investment

Agency not only concerns individuals' will to act but also involves taking concrete actions to achieve their goals (Duff, 2012; Pavlenko, 2000). In the current study, as a high-level proficiency participant, Chen actively exerted her agency to construct

numerous positive identities in and out of classroom to invest in both English segmental and suprasegmental features. To be specific, she liked to be the little teacher in the Spoken English class, an active learner in the English listening and speaking class, and a self-disciplined learner out of class to promote her investment in English pronunciation learning in order to achieve the symbolic and material resources as well as realized her imagined identities. Similarly, due to her poor English pronunciation and introverted personality, Ping was willing to be a good listener who received guidance from the English translator in the Tourism English class but avoided participating in interactive activities in class. Meanwhile, in the free and relaxed dormitory, she was an active learner who read along with the audio to learn segmental features every Monday to Friday. However, given that agency was by no means “socially unfettered free will” (Ahern, 2001, p. 112), it was also important to acknowledge the various contextual constraints on participants’ exercise of agency in investing in English pronunciation learning. That is, agency can be both constitutive of and constituted by social structures (Block, 2007). The researcher will discuss how contextual factors limit the five participants’ agency in the next section.

From the analysis, with the exception of Chen, the other participants, Lan, Ping, Ma, and Xi were reluctant to invest in English pronunciation due to the difficulty of English pronunciation learning. This concurs with a study by Setter and Jenkins (2005) who found that among the aspects of L2, English pronunciation appears to be a ‘difficult’ aspect to teach and learn. In the current study, the reasons for this difficulty include the lack of input on systematic suprasegmental phonetic knowledge as well as its learning

methods during the participants' English phonetic course, which were also found in some scholars' studies (Wenger, 1998; Peng, 2017; Zhang, 2018; Derwing, 2015). At the same time, it reflects the actual situation of English pronunciation teaching in China. One inference is that most teachers pay less attention to phonetics-related teaching and learning, and they may not be engaged in professional research on phonetics (Wang, 2015).

Moreover, there appears to be a mismatch between the practiced and imagined communities that hinders learners' investment. Norton (2001) suggested that learning is not simply confined to the actual communities that learners participate in, such as schools, church, and language clubs; instead, to a great extent, the involvement of distant communities constructed through learners' imaginations also serves as a significant source that creates an impact on their learning. Alignment between imagined and practiced communities may positively enhance language learning investment (Teng & Bui, 2018). However, English learners may not make investments to become members of the target language community when a practiced community does not match the imagined community of EFL learning. For instance, since the sophomore year, the TEM-4 and TEM-8 exams for English majors have become the focus of teaching and learning, and the English pronunciation courses that participants expected were no longer offered as well as overloaded with homework, which made participants Xi and Ping's enthusiasm for improving their English pronunciation proficiency begin to fade. It was consistent with the previous findings (Cummins, 2001; Norton, 2010; Teng & Bui, 2018) that a match between the practiced community and the imagined community

yields coercive or collaborative power and facilitates the development of learner identity, while a misalignment is detrimental to the investment in EFL learning.

A third factor that hinders learning investment is abusive power. As Norton (1995) explained that although a student may have a strong motivation to learn a language, he or she may not invest in the process because of the complexity and contradiction of identities that the learner constructed when power relations (or disempowerment) were established. In other words, when a highly motivated language learner is socially, physically, and psychologically victimized by racism, classicism, homophobia, misogyny, and other types of prejudice from peers, teachers, and institutions, he or she may poorly invest or invest nothing in the language learning process (Mona & Rodriguez, 2017). In the current study, both Chen and Xi liked to socialize. However, when they sometimes actively tried to communicate with their classmates in English, some of their classmates would speak ill of them and thought they were showing off. Therefore, their desire for communication gradually faded away. In this sense, the imbalance of power relations and social injustice not only influence learners' identities but also damage their investment in foreign language learning.

A fourth constraint for learning investment in English pronunciation is the lack of institutional support for social communication between the poor and good learners as well as cultural exchange between local and exchange students. Echoing Sung's (2019) findings, participants like Chen, Lan, and Ping's access to the networks of exchange students and L2 interactive opportunities on campus was limited, leading to negative

news related to international students among local student groups. Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that while the agency could play a role in directing English pronunciation investments, various contextual constraints could have an impact on the exercise of agency in English pronunciation investments and development, which could, in turn, influence the outcomes of the English pronunciation learning trajectory (Sung, 2019).

5.2.5 The Complex Relationship between learners' English pronunciation learning beliefs and investment.

In terms of the relationship between belief and investment, the results from this study revealed three groups that illustrate different degrees of congruence or in-congruence between learners' beliefs and investment; positive, negative and manifested in-congruence. Chen demonstrated an almost positive congruence, which is not completely congruent between her beliefs and investment. Lan and Ma displayed a negative congruence between their beliefs and investment while the remaining two participants, Ping and Xi, manifested in-congruence compared to what they stated as beliefs in the interviews with their observed investment.

Three key points can be derived from the findings on congruence and in-congruence that need to be interpreted and discussed in light of previous work and arguments. Firstly, the least number of cases (1 out of 5) showed positive congruence regarding beliefs and investments. Secondly, the two in-congruent cases held more positive beliefs compared to their investments. In other words, participants' investment in pronunciation

lagged far behind their beliefs. Thirdly, two cases held negative congruence between their beliefs and investments, which represented negligence in pronunciation both in their beliefs and investments, leading to a serious problem. To discuss these points, the cases were divided into three sets: positive congruence, negative congruence, and incongruent groups.

5.2.5.1 Positive Congruence Cases

The current study found almost positive congruence between beliefs and investments in only one case although Chen did not take advantage of communication strategies to learn English phonetics. There were two points worth noting from the positive congruence between beliefs and the investment of an advanced English pronunciation learner, in the case of Chen. Firstly, it was clear that both her belief and investment displayed the importance of learning English pronunciation. Compared with the other four participants, who started to realize the role of English pronunciation until university, Chen's English pronunciation learning experience was rich in and out of the classroom since primary school, which prompted her to realize the importance of English pronunciation from an early age and consistently invest her energy and time in improving it.

Secondly is agency power. Unlike the intermediate and low-level proficiency participants in this study who gave up their English pronunciation learning or constructed poor learner identities because of contextual constraints, Chen took her

agency power to construct positive identities in different contexts to make effective English pronunciation investments by overcoming constraints. In Chen's case, although she felt English pronunciation learning is difficult, instead of complaining, she persistently invested in English pronunciation learning. For example, when she felt frustrated with learning pronunciation, she employed emotional strategies (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) to help her regain motivation and confidence in learning. Besides, due to the lack of opportunities for extracurricular English communication, whenever there were interactive activities in the English speaking and listening class, she actively participated in them to practice her English pronunciation. Moreover, since the English pronunciation course in the classroom was mainly limited to the segmental features that could not meet her learning needs, she transferred her energy and time to the online courses supplementing her super-segmental knowledge. In a nutshell, she used her agency ability to achieve maximum symbolic and material resources in constrained learning contexts and to become whoever she dreamed to be (Hajar, 2017; Lamb, 2013). Chen's diverse investment strategies are consistent with the research findings of Norton and Tucci (2001), which compared good and poor students. The former were more willing to "exercise human agency to negotiate their entry into the social networks, so they can practice and improve their competence in the target language" (p.256). The latter, who were subjected to contextual constraints, were unwilling to adopt agentic behaviors to foster changes in their EFL learning. Hence, investment is complex, necessitating a greater connection with identity (Norton, 1995).

5.2.5.2 Negative congruence cases

Two of the five cases in this study showed negative congruence between their beliefs and investments. Lan and Ma thought English pronunciation was Cinderella in English learning, which could not bring any symbolic or material resources. Hence, in practice, they did not invest any energy or effort in English pronunciation learning. Two main reasons to explain the negative congruent case are as follows: firstly, the belief and investment in these two cases did not show the importance they attached to learning English pronunciation. Namely, both their beliefs and investment were naïve in terms of English pronunciation learning, whether in or out of the classroom. It can be interpreted that learners with naïve beliefs were more likely to be aligned with their investment, as these unsophisticated and naïve beliefs didn't encounter serious difficulties in transforming into investment.

Secondly, the negative congruence between the learners' beliefs and investment in English pronunciation represented negligence in English pronunciation both in their beliefs and investment, leading to a serious problem. It has already been proven in several studies that English pronunciation components help to improve learners' competencies in the English language, although adult learners progress at different levels due to factors such as motivation and attitude (Jenkins, 2006). English pronunciation as one crucial component was neglected, and if the situation persisted, the goal of achieving communicative competence would not be fulfilled. Learners would be deprived of their rights to develop a good self-image through good pronunciation. On the other hand, learners' English learning beliefs were not only derived from previous

learning experiences but also social interaction with friends and classmates (Barcelos, 2003; Kalaja, 1995; Gabillion, 2005). Hence, if the negative beliefs and investments were not altered accordingly, they would affect other peers' English pronunciation learning belief and investment.

5.2.5.3 In-congruent cases

Two of the five cases showed in-congruence between their beliefs and investments. This finding indicated that putting learners' beliefs into investment was not a smooth process. Participants Ping, and Xi believed that English pronunciation could bring material and symbolic resources, help construct their imagined identities, and enter imagined communities, but in practice, Ping only invested in phonetic knowledge of segmental features with cognitive memory strategies, and Xi learned English pronunciation incidentally when it was necessary. These findings indicated that, in addition to beliefs, other personal and contextual factors hinder the learners' investments in English pronunciation learning in and out of the classroom. This finding supported Ellis's (2008) argument that "the fact that learners hold a particular belief is no guarantee they will act on it; conflicts with other strongly held beliefs, situational constraints, or personal reasons may prevent them" (p. 703).

5.3 Theoretical Implication

All research requires a contribution to the existing body of knowledge in a particular field, especially research undertaken as an academic degree requirement, such as

doctoral research. According to Petre and Rugg (2004), a contribution to knowledge is meant to add something to a discourse that can be seen as a "significant, albeit moderate, contribution." The characteristic of such contributions was to answer, "So what?" (p. 14). Therefore, the discussions and interpretations expanded beyond the findings of the study. The purpose of this section was to summarize the contributions of current research.

5.3.1 Filling research gaps within the Chinese context

The contextually original research questions aimed to fill the research gaps and provide answers to the unsatisfactory and less than ideal English pronunciation proficiency concerning English pronunciation teaching and learning within the Chinese educational system. In the last ten years, many scholars have focused on students' English pronunciation learning (Gao, 2000; Dang & Cui, 2013; Fu, 2007; Zhang, 2009; Yang & Yang, 2007) by implementing surveys to explore learners' different individual factors, like motivation, anxiety, attitude, and self-concept. However, very few have focused on learners' beliefs and investments. Thus, the current study which deliberates on learners' beliefs and investment in learning English pronunciation would fill this gap and contribute to the understanding of the relationship among beliefs, investment, and sociocultural influences within the Chinese context. Meanwhile, it is also anticipated that the study will contribute to the ongoing effort to develop a theory of individual differences and the role they play in language learning.

5.3.2 Relationship between imagined identity and learner's pronunciation learning belief

The results from this study have revealed the different relationship between identities and learners' beliefs in learning English pronunciation. Based on the conceptual framework discussed earlier, learners' language learning beliefs have both a cognitive and social nature, as they are based on learners' identity and learners' previous learning experiences (van Dijk, 1998; Pajares, 1992; Barcelos, 2003) and social interaction with others (parents, friends, teachers, etc.), as well as the tools (media, textbooks, classroom activities, etc.) provided with or within those social environments (Barcelos, 2003; Kalaja, 1995; Gabillion, 2005). Initially, the concept of learner's imagined identity was not thought of as a contributing factor in English pronunciation learning beliefs. However, the data suggested a strong relationship between students' English pronunciation learning beliefs as an English major, as well as their imagined identities. The results indicated that participants' diverse identities helped them construct different English pronunciation learning beliefs in an EFL environment.

5.3.3 Providing lists of contextual constraints and facilitating factors regarding fostering English pronunciation learning investment

Although previous research and arguments have illustrated some constraints of fostering English learning (Majumdar, 2010; Norton, 2000; Talmy, 2004; Skinnari, 2014) as well as facilitating factors (Block, 2007, 2012; Ellwood 2009; Gao et al. 2015; Giroir, 2014a, 2014b; Makubalo, 2007; Sacchi, 2014; Skapoulli, 2019; Vasilopoulos, 2015), these constraints and facilitating factors were not specified to the English pronunciation

learning. Therefore, the current study provided a special list of constraints and of facilitating factors associated with fostering English pronunciation learning investment in and out the English classroom.

5.3.4 The Good English pronunciation Learner

Ever since Rubin's (1975) seminal work, *What the Good Language Learner Can Teach Us*, researchers had been investigating the strategies and styles that the good language learner used hoping to prove some implication for the unsuccessful learners (Griffiths, 2008; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; White, 2008). Ellis (2008) concluded five mainly aspects of successful language learning, based on research on the good language learner studies: (1) a concern for language form, (2) a concern for communication (functional practice), (3) an active task approach, (4) an awareness of the learning process, and (5) a capacity to use strategies flexibly in accordance with task requirements (p.708).

This study further elucidated the characteristics of good language learners. As the only advanced English pronunciation learner, Chen outperformed other participants. Given that she experienced the same sociocultural (macro level) and educational (micro level) contexts, what made Chen more successful? In terms of English pronunciation learning, belief, and investment, Chen distinguished herself from the other participants in the following ways:

Firstly, be more empathetic towards the target culture. Unlike the other four participants, who were not interested in the target language culture, Chen was curious about English-speaking countries such as the USA and UK and was keen to know about their values and customs. She made efforts to understand and feel the culture of English-speaking countries through movies, TV series, English novels, and participating in Chinese and foreign cultural exchange activities held by the foreign language school.

Secondly, more diverse learning beliefs. Not only did she hold positive English pronunciation learning beliefs, but her pronunciation learning strategy beliefs were more diverse than those of other intermediate- and low-level proficiency participants, including cognitive strategies, social strategies, affective strategies, and meta-cognitive strategies. Moreover, she was the only participant who suggested that affective strategies and meta-cognitive strategies could help her pronunciation learning.

Thirdly, more agentic power. Although, like the other four participants, Chen felt difficulty learning English pronunciation as well, instead of complaining, she persistently invested in English pronunciation. For example, when she felt frustrated with learning pronunciation, she employed emotional strategies (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) to help her regain motivation and confidence in learning. Besides, due to the lack of opportunities for extracurricular English communication, whenever there were interactive activities in the English speaking and listening class, she actively participated in them to practice her pronunciation accuracy and fluency as a tutor. Since the English pronunciation course in the classroom was mainly limited to the segmental

features that could not meet her learning needs, she transferred her energy and time to the online courses supplementing her suprasegmental knowledge. In brief, she used her agency ability to achieve maximum symbolic and material resources in constrained learning contexts and to become whoever she dreamed to be (Hajar, 2017; Lamb, 2013).

5.3.5 Relationship between learners' English pronunciation beliefs and investment in English pronunciation learning

The fifth implication of the current study was the inclusion of congruence or incongruence between belief and investment in English pronunciation learning studies. The past studies were restricted only to determining the learners' English pronunciation beliefs (Simon & Taverniers, 2011; Simon, 2005; Alghazo, 2015; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015; Nowacka, 2012; Nguyen & Hung, 2021) or general English learning investment (Babino & Steward, 2017; Ballinger, 2017; Bea, 2013; Babino & Stewart, 2019), but they very few ventured into the studying the relationship between beliefs and investment. Hence, this study offers some insights into the interactions between these two variables. The belief-investment relationship was omitted from the past studies. Hence, this study offers some insights into the interactions between these two variables.

Firstly, it suggests a linear relationship between the learner's beliefs and investment in terms of English pronunciation learning. For example, two low-level proficiency English pronunciation learners, Lan and Ma thought that English pronunciation was not only difficult to learn but they adopted it as a Cinderella that could not bring much

material and symbolic resources in the context of written-examination culture. Hence, even though they each proposed strategies to promote their English pronunciation, in the actual learning process, neither of them made any English pronunciation learning investment. In contrast, Chen believed that English pronunciation was significant for her to achieve symbolic and material resources and thought practical phonetic courses, imitation, teacher error correction, self-evaluation, and communication could help her improve English pronunciation. Hence, in the class, she actively participated in phonetic learning activities, asked for help from the teacher, and took advantage of her ability to create communication opportunities. Out of class, when she was free, Chen learned English pronunciation in various ways, such as by acquiring phonetic knowledge through an online course, imitating through singing English songs, doing English dubbing, listening to recordings of herself, and doing self-evaluation to improve her English pronunciation difficulties. The findings were consistent with the statement that learners' investment level in language depended on their understanding of how language learning would "increase the value of their cultural capital and social power" (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Secondly, the data also suggested that the relationships between these two constructs were non-linear. The learners were able to identify English pronunciation strategies that would promote English pronunciation in and out of the classroom and justify the reasons why they believed in the effectiveness of these strategies to promote English pronunciation. However, the observed investments were different due to some personal and contextual factors like personal agency, difficulty in English pronunciation, a

mismatch between the imagined and practical community, abusive power, and a lack of institutional support. For example, the two intermediate-level participants, Ping and Xi, recognized the role of pronunciation in English learning and believed that it helped them acquire symbolic (education, friendship, language) as well as material (money, property, goods) resources. However, in practice, Ping's main energy and effort were invested in segmental features by reading after the Voice of America (VOA), memorizing the sounds of words, and paying attention to the teacher's correction, neglecting the learning of suprasegmental phonetic knowledge. In the same vein, Xi's time and energy were mainly focused on the TEM-4 exam rather than investing in English pronunciation based on her English pronunciation learning strategy beliefs.

Based on the discussion above, a model of learner's English pronunciation learning belief is proposed aimed at capturing the interactions between these three variables and the learning contexts. See Figure 5.1.

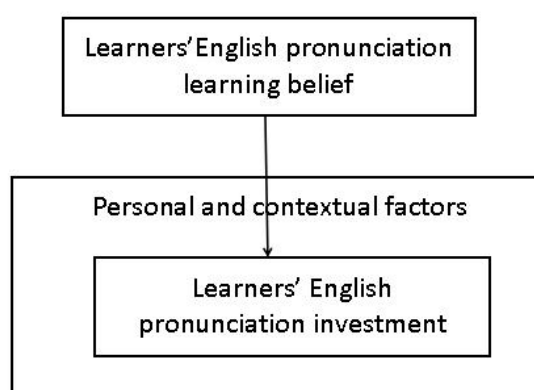


Figure 5.1: Proposed Model of the Relationships between Learner Beliefs and investment in terms of English pronunciation learning in China.

5.4 Practical Implication

5.4.1 Implication for English Examination Policy

The study illustrated that some participants neglected English pronunciation learning because based on their English learning experiences from primary school to university, English pronunciation was not assessed in any high-stake English examinations in the country. This situation is attributed to China's exam-oriented education system, where the instruction objectives, content, and methods neglect the cultivation of communicative skills, thereby shaping students' negative beliefs in English pronunciation learning. Therefore, English education policymakers should incorporate English pronunciation tests into English exams to increase students' emphasis and focus on English pronunciation and to form positive English pronunciation learning beliefs.

5.4.2 Implication for English textbook designer

As a case study, this research indicates that even though the global status of English has been acknowledged by some participants, the current practice of ELT, including pronunciation teaching in this research, still heavily relies on a native-oriented perspective. Therefore, although reforming and challenging, it is suggested that textbook designers include the components of multilingualism to critically evaluate the current teaching materials and to realize the situation that 'English is being used in the larger social context and design curricula that are in keeping with the English demands of the students' (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008, p.196).

5.4.3 Implication for School

Firstly, extend instruction hours for English phonetics courses. This study revealed that all five participants thought the English phonetic course was too short to cover systematic phonetic knowledge in the first semester of their freshman year. Due to the lack of systematic pronunciation teaching and learning, they felt that it was difficult to learn pronunciation. They have expressed hope that the duration of the phonics course would last for 2 years and that both theoretical and practical knowledge of suprasegmental features should be increased rather than simply having International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) explanation and sound discrimination. Hence, school policymakers should extend instruction hours for English phonetics courses and adjust the hours of English phonetics courses in the syllabus (2000) for English majors according to their actual learning needs.

Secondly, organize more intercultural communication activities. In this study, Chen stated that she could not find an ideal social partner outside of class to practice English. Despite having international students at the university, Lan and Ping complained that they did not have channels to establish stable relationships with these students at the school, thus contributing to the factor of not being able to improve their English pronunciation through communication outside of class. Thus, schools should organize more English communication activities like English corners, and intercultural communication activities so that students can have the opportunity to be in a real English communication context and help them eliminate cultural barriers.

Thirdly, schools can arrange social practice activities as early as possible. Lan and Ma held negative beliefs about English pronunciation learning, mainly because their past English learning experience made them feel that pronunciation could not bring any material and symbolic resources. This implies that students need social practice to enhance their curiosity about learning English pronunciation and find meaning in learning it. Adolescent learners can change their beliefs, goals, and dreams (Suzuki, 2012). Therefore, schools need to offer learners as many opportunities for internships as possible to interact with people who are engaged in English-related jobs. For example, each academic year, the school can organize a visit to foreign trade companies or other schools, etc., to learn the requirements and significance of English pronunciation. Those opportunities are “educational experiences” (van Lier, 2004, p. 5) that are beneficial for correcting their negative beliefs.

5.4.4 Implication for English teacher

This study has some implications for English teachers. Firstly, in the current study, Xi was the only participant who felt lost in the dilemma between nativelikeness and intelligibility. Even though she realized that it was very difficult to be like native-likeness, she still believed that native-likeness was the best. However, in reality, she could not achieve it, making her not know what her phonetic goal was. Therefore, teachers should help learners set more reasonable English pronunciation learning goals. When goals are realistic and achievable, learners can notice the progress they are making. Furthermore, teachers should encourage them to measure their success by self-

improvement rather than triumph over others (Bandura, 1995). They become more confident when they know they can accomplish tasks that they were unable to do before.

Secondly, English teachers should establish a positive belief in the pronunciation of English. In applied linguistics, Horwitz (1988) asserts that teachers may be perceived by students as "experts," and they may strongly influence students' beliefs about what language is and how to learn it. Another research has also highlighted the influence of teachers on students' beliefs, both in terms of teachers' behavior (Kern, 1995) and in terms of how students' assumptions about learning reflect traditional learning and teaching systems (Holec, 1987). In this study, Lan and Ma considered English pronunciation unimportant and without any symbolic or material significance. Their negative pronunciation learning belief was mainly influenced by their English teachers' Cinderella treatment of English pronunciation in their previous English learning classrooms. Therefore, English teachers should adjust their pronunciation teaching attitude in the classroom and pay more attention to pronunciation with their students.

Thirdly, teachers should try to create a supportive and kind learning environment in the classroom. In this study, Ping complained that she would like to be a passive learner in the classroom because she was afraid her poor pronunciation would be ridiculed by classmates and criticized by teachers, thus deliberately missing the opportunities to participate in classroom interactive activities. Ping's case might not be an isolated one, thus teachers need to be reminded to pay attention to the participation of students of different levels in classroom activities and encourage each student to construct a positive identity to participate in classroom activities.

Fourthly, English teachers should increase English interaction and teacher error correction activities in the class. Most participants believed that social strategies, including communication and teacher correction, would improve their English pronunciation. However, they complained that the limited English interactive activities in the classroom caused them to get used to being passive listeners rather than active speakers in the classroom. Based on my classroom observation, even in the *English listening and speaking* class and the *Spoken English* class that are closely related to English pronunciation, there are only a handful of interactive activities. Hence, English teachers should add more discussion activities in the classroom to provide students with opportunities to speak freely and give timely feedback.

5.4.5 Implication for English teacher education

Firstly, in the current study, all the participants mentioned that their English phonetic teachers spent their time and energy on segmental features rather than suprasegmental features. This may be because their English phonetic teachers lack of suprasegmental features as well as the teaching methods to deal with. Hence, in the process of teacher training and education, these two aspects deserve more attention.

Secondly, in the current study, some participants complained that the foreign language teacher has little knowledge about Chinese students' needs. Hence, in the future, Chinese university and college should open relevant training programs to cultivate the foreign language teachers knowledge about Chinese students and improve their teaching skills that fit for Chinese learners.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Studies

Future research can further explore the unresolved issues in this study based on the conclusions of this study. Four future research directions are proposed.

Firstly, previous studies have shown that gender differences in learners can lead to differences in learning beliefs (Daif Allah, 2012). This study was conducted at a foreign language school in a normal university. During the selection of participants, there were more female students who volunteered compared to male students. Thus this study only investigated female students beliefs and investments in English pronunciation learning. Future research should explore the beliefs and investments of male students, as well as the differences between male and female students in these two concepts.

Secondly, the data collection phase of this study was carried out during the COVID-19 epidemic. As schools were almost closed, observation of the English pronunciation investment could only be done within the school, such as in classrooms and dormitories. Future research can gain a deeper understanding of the identity construction of students and the corresponding investment in pronunciation learning in different places other than the inside and outside the school such as the extracurricular tutoring institutions or part-time workplace.

Thirdly, the data collection period of this study was limited to one semester, which only revealed the participants' beliefs and investment in phonics learning during this period. Since learners' beliefs are characterized by static and dynamic (Barcelos, 2003), future

research can use longitudinal studies to extend the data collection time to present a more complete and in-depth understanding of participants' beliefs at different learning stages and the factors that affect the development and change of investment in English pronunciation learning.

Fourthly, the formation of learning beliefs and investment behavior in this study is influenced by policymakers, school leaders, curriculum teachers, and parents. Thus, future research with a similar focus needs to include these individuals' perspectives.

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