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Contents

1 Introduction	3
2 Learners' motivations and parental expectations	4
2.1 Theoretical constructs of motivation	4
2.2 Empirical studies on young learners' motivation	4
2.3 Studies on parental expectations	5
2.4 Parental expectation and children's academic development	5
2.5 Parental expectation and second language acquisition	6
2.6 The research: gaps and questions	7
3 Research methods employed in this study	8
3.1 Participating schools, and children with their parents, for the research	8
3.2 Questionnaires for the participating children and parents	9
3.3 Elicited metaphor analysis	9
4 Findings	11
4.1 Findings from the child questionnaire	11
4.1.1 School year differences.....	12
4.1.2 School differences	13
4.2 Findings from the elicited metaphors and entailments	14
4.2.1 Attitudes towards learning English through metaphors	14
4.2.1.1 Positive metaphors	14
4.2.1.2 Neutral metaphors.....	15
4.2.1.3 Negative metaphors.....	15
4.2.1.4 Ambivalent metaphors.....	15
4.2.2 Types of metaphors created by participating children	16
4.2.2.1 Metaphors using food and drink	16
4.2.2.2 Metaphors using living things.....	16
4.2.2.3 Metaphors representing movement or travel.....	17
4.2.2.4 Metaphors referring to playing or leisure.....	17
4.2.2.5 Nature, household items and the remaining unclassified metaphors	17
4.2.3 Interpreting pupils' perceptions through examining the entailments	17
4.2.3.1 Perceptions of the learning process.....	18
4.2.3.2 Outcome/achievement	18
4.2.3.3 Objectives/purposes.....	18
4.2.3.4 Emotion/feeling	18
4.2.3.5 Comparing different schools and age groups.....	19

4.3 Findings from parental expectations of four primary schools	20
4.3.1 Survey of parents' expectations of the learning of English.....	20
4.3.1.1 Descriptive analysis.....	20
4.3.1.2 Inferential analysis.....	21
4.3.1.3 Different expectations of parents with children of different year groups.....	21
4.3.1.4 School differences	22
4.3.2 Interview findings from parents.....	23
4.3.2.1 Six aspects of parental expectations through interviews.....	23
4.3.2.2 Parental expectations in different schools	23
5 Limitations and further research.....	27
6 Conclusions.....	28
References.....	30

1

Introduction

China has the largest number of people involved in English language teaching (ELT) and learning in the world. Required by the national curriculum from 2001, English is a compulsory subject for Chinese primary schools. Some schools provide ELT from Y1 (age seven), but the majority of primary schools start ELT from Y3 (age nine). Thus, compared with ELT in secondary schools and universities, ELT in primary schools has a very short history; however, it continues to expand as schools meet parental demand to lower the ELT starting age.

This paper presents research findings from a project sponsored by an English Language Teaching Research Partnership (ELTRP) award from the British Council. It aims to construct a platform for research, debate and the improvement of ELT in Chinese primary schools, since this is a rarely studied area within Chinese ELT.

There have been limited studies published on primary ELT in China. The few studies published are mainly concerned with the quality and qualifications of English teachers in Chinese primary schools (e.g. Wu and Yang, 2008), with English curriculum design (e.g. Li, 2004), teaching materials and methods (e.g. Jin and Cortazzi, 1998; Cortazzi and Jin, 2001), teaching pronunciation and vocabulary, and the use of games (e.g. Wang and Wu, 2008). This strongly indicates that the focus of research of primary ELT has been from teachers' and organisational perspectives rather than those of learners or parents. Furthermore, the few publications regarding the motivations and expectations of English primary learners and parents in China (e.g. Wang, 2011) mainly describe the need to motivate primary learners rather than report an actual investigation of primary learners' motivations and parental expectations of English language learning.

In China now, with the revised English curriculum development over ten years, there is a wider recognition of the need for more learner-centred approaches and an increasing interest in the perspectives of all participants (notably to include the learners and their parents). It is timely for researchers to consider learners' views, motivations, experiences and expectations of English learning and to listen to parents' views. For teacher trainers, teachers, and ultimately parents, to have a research-based understanding of these key issues should facilitate children's learning of English (and other subjects). Knowing the learners' views will give insights to help educational policy makers and primary English teachers with vital decisions and provisions in curriculum design, teaching and training. Knowing parents' views helps us to understand parental perceptions of their own roles in the learning of young children, with implications for disseminating good parenting practices from educational perspectives. While this orientation has a long history of acknowledgement and development in Early Years education in the West and substantial development in China, there is a gap in understanding regarding parental support and contributions for the learning of English, perhaps because many teachers of English in schools have more of a background in language teaching and they may have paid relatively little attention to home and parental roles in English learning.

This paper starts by reviewing motivational studies of learners in general, and young learners in particular, and research on parental expectations. It then moves to discuss the research methods employed in this study, especially to give some explanation of a more innovative research method – elicited metaphor analysis – used in this investigation. Later, data from both learners and parents are presented and analysed. A concluding discussion considers key findings and implications for future research on the topic.

2

Learners' motivations and parental expectations

2.1 Theoretical constructs of motivation

Second language (L2) motivation has long been demonstrated as one of the most important factors for successful language learning. L2 motivation is closely associated with higher language proficiency (e.g. Gorges et al., 2012; Yu and Shen, 2012), persistence in learning an L2 (e.g. Noels, 2001; Ramage, 1990), attitudes toward L2 learning or even the attitudes toward speakers from the L2 community (e.g. Clément et al., 1994; Gardner et al., 1983). Even so, there seems to be little consensus on the definition of L2 motivation (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 117). L2 motivation is defined for this study as:

'The dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, co-ordinates, amplifies, terminates and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritised, operationalised and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out.' (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998, p. 65).

According to this definition, L2 motivation should be regarded as a process-oriented theoretical construct, offering a renewed understanding of the nature of L2 motivation. Previously, this motivation was mainly understood from a structuralist view, and thus it was commonly assumed that L2 motivation is a fixed, static and decontextualised notion (Norton, 1997). However, growing numbers of empirical studies have refuted this line of thought (e.g. Dörnyei and Csizér, 2002; Ushioda, 2001). L2 motivation is now often taken to be a dynamic, fluid and contextualised theoretical concept (Kim, 2005; Norton, 2000; Ushioda, 2009, 2013). This study aims to look into the L2 motivations of young Chinese learners of English from this dynamic and contextualised process view and to examine what factors motivate these learners.

Furthermore, this shift in understanding L2 motivation has brought about changes in research methods. A number of L2 motivation researchers argue that more qualitative studies should be adopted to underpin the changing nature of L2 motivation (e.g. Kim, 2005; Ushioda, 2009). In this current study, elicited metaphor analysis is used to explore the insights of these young learners.

2.2 Empirical studies on young learners' motivation

Although L2 motivation has been found to play an apparently decisive role in L2 learning, most research has centred on students in secondary or tertiary education; comprehensive enquiries into the foundation stages for younger learners seem to be lacking (Jin et al., 2014). Surveying primary and secondary students from 78 schools in Singapore (N=4214), Yeung and his colleagues (2011) examined the developmental trajectory of L2 motivation. They reported that primary students were more motivated to learn English than those in secondary schools and that both boys and girls experienced a downward trend in L2 motivation. Such a decline in L2 motivation has been documented in a range of studies in other parts of the world (e.g. Dörnyei et al., 2006; Fraine et al., 2007; Henry and Apeltgren, 2008; Enever, 2011). Yet in China the dearth of examining the L2 motivation of young learners is apparent. Jin et al. (2014) found few empirical studies of L2 motivation on young learners in the largest Chinese e-journal database (with over 20,000 journals). Clearly, it is vital to pay more attention to this particular group of young English learners – they represent a significant portion of the largest national population worldwide.

Wu (2003) examined the intrinsic motivation of 72 L2 beginners of English (aged 4–6) by adopting a quasi-experimental design, maintaining that Self-Determination Theory plus the 'immediate class environment' offers a useful way to understand young learners' L2 motivation and that the antecedents of intrinsic L2 motivation are related to learning environments, the difficulty of tasks, instructional support, and the pattern of evaluation and attribution (p. 510).

Yan (2006) examined the beliefs of primary school learners (n=118; M=58, F=60; aged 10–12) from one selected school, using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. It was found that, compared with the English proficiency of their parents, these young respondents seemed to be more confident in their English language skills. More than half of the participants believed that learning English and knowing about the target cultures should be related.

These two findings appear to support the basic assumption of Gardner's (1985) socio-education model, which stressed the role of influences from social and educational contexts and individual differences. Furthermore, Yan (2006) reported that the L2 motivation of these learners is complex and multifaceted (e.g. a combination of integrative and instrumental orientations). Fewer than ten students believed that English learning is for the sake of examinations. This study also revealed the important role played by English teachers, as one fifth of the informants reported they learnt English because of their teacher. However, this research did not specify whether the role of teachers was due to teachers' professional practices, their personality or putting pressure on learners, or something else.

Similarly, Gao (2003) conducted a questionnaire-based survey among 182 students from a selected urban school (M=93, F=89; grade and age unspecified). The findings showed that participants' motivational profile revealed a complex pattern of five different categories: undefined motivation (e.g. learning English is a burden, but not specified); learning English as a responsibility (e.g. to live up to the expectations of parents or teachers); learning English for interest; learning English for self-actualisation (e.g. learning English to get into a better university); and learning English for one's country (e.g. learning English to raise the life quality of Chinese people). Even with this more detailed categorisation, this study pointed out that the L2 motivation of these learners seems to be more complex than expected. This finding constitutes evidence against the overly simplified and dichotomous understanding of L2 motivation – such as the increasingly critiqued binary distinctions of instrumental-integrative or intrinsic-extrinsic motivation (Dörnyei, 1998; Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009, 2011; Ushioda, 2011, 2013). It may also indicate a need to approach the L2 motivation of young learners from multiple angles and research methods.

Through examining the research methods used in published studies in China, it is evident that existing studies mostly used a one-off questionnaire as their major enquiry tool. This might be inadequately capable of capturing the fluidity of L2 motivation and identifying any developmental trends, and thus may not offer an in-depth understanding of young learners.

To summarise, given the widely recognised impact of L2 motivation on learning, research on this has been abundant in the West, yet the study of motivations of young learners of English in China remains an under-researched area. This investigation aims to contribute some results and insights that will be useful for tracing the development pattern of L2 motivation among young Chinese learners and

clarifying how complex contextual factors (e.g. parental involvement and the impact of teachers) interact with the L2 motivation of these learners.

2.3 Studies on parental expectations

From the perspective of psychology, expectation is a changeable mental status, which can be considered as a predictable recognition based on people's reactions to external contexts or the need for inner strength arising from their own or others' prediction of behavioural outcomes (Zhu, 1989). Parental expectations, in particular, mainly consist of the attitudes a parent has about their child's academic success and educational outcomes (Cook, 2009).

Parental expectation has been seen in terms of short-term (Entwisle and Hayduk, 1978) and long-term expectations (Clare et al., 1998). Thus, a short-term expectation refers to parents' academic or social developmental goals for their children in the immediate or near future, while a long-term expectation accounts for the future or long-lasting anticipation of children's educational attainment (Cook, 2009). Other researchers distinguish between realistic and idealistic expectations regarding the possibility of their realisation (e.g. Stern, 2007). A realistic expectation typically refers to parental prediction of children's academic performance based on school feedback, such as information parents gain from their children's school reports, while idealistic expectations are the wishes, dreams, desires and hopeful anticipations or parental beliefs about their child's academic future (Seginer, 1983).

Even though 'parental expectation' may be defined variously by different researchers, this study characterises parental expectations as the beliefs or anticipations that parents have about their children's future development as reflected in academic achievement (Boocock, 1972), school attendance (Kurdek and Sinclair, 1988), children's motivation (Jacobs et al., 2005) and college attendance (Jacob, 2010).

2.4 Parental expectation and children's academic development

The role of parental expectations in affecting children's academic achievement has received much attention for over 50 years (Yamamoto and Holloway, 2010). Parental expectations are recognised for their great impact on academic performance for students of all ages, including kindergarten learners (Galper et al., 1997), primary children (Baker and Entwisle, 1987; Marjoribanks, 1987; Alexander et al., 1996; Entwisle and Hayduk, 1988), middle school students (Davis-Kean, 2005), and high school students (Ainley et al., 1991). The level of parental expectations for children's educational attainment strongly predicts

their level of academic achievement (Vygotsky, 1962; Entwisle and Hayduk, 1978; Alexander et al., 1988; Davis-Kean, 2005; Pearce, 2006; Jacob, 2010). Such research shows how the higher the parental expectations are, the more the demands they place on their children; possibly also the more help parents offer their children, the higher their children achieve their academic goals. Some empirical studies have examined the relationship between parental expectations and children's academic performance. For example, Li (2003) interviewed Chinese immigrant students in Canada and showed how parental expectations are beneficial for strengthening and cultivating learners' good learning habits. Positive parental expectations have strong implications for parents' active involvement in their children's studies. These learners are likely to grasp learning skills more quickly under parental guidance and form a sense of accomplishment. Regarding the sustainability and changes of parental expectations, Goldenberg et al., (2001) conducted a longitudinal study (kindergarten to sixth grade) of 81 students, applying quantitative and qualitative methods. Results indicated that parents' educational expectations were high throughout the elementary years; however, expectations fluctuated through later years. A study into Chinese mothers' educational background (Zhou and Jin, 2012) also showed that young children whose mothers had a higher education background achieved better results with regard to the development of their communicative and pragmatic abilities.

2.5 Parental expectation and second language acquisition

Clearly, parents play important roles in laying the foundation for children's language learning. Parental factors (e.g. their incomes, educational attainment and occupations) are associated with their children's language development at school (Fernandez and Nielsen, 1986; Hampton et al., 1995). Besides general influences, empirical studies show that parental expectations are significant influences on children's language learning, for their development of both their mother tongue and a second language.

Chen (2009) surveyed ten families to explore parents' expectations of their pre-school children by applying a phenomenological methodology to show how their expectations of children's early English learning are deeply influenced by social-cultural contexts. This research draws attention to the promotion of harmonised development, embracing social change, parental expectations and children's second language development. Employing face-to-face interviews and follow-up telephone enquiries, Yang (2011) surveyed six Chinese immigrant parents in New Zealand. Findings indicated that parents with

high expectations of children's learning of English and numeracy appeared to involve their children in various educational activities at home to facilitate this learning and to construct a highly supportive environment through positive parent-child interaction.

Even though the role of parents is stressed in so many learning situations (e.g. Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994), very few L2 motivation models include parental roles in their theoretical constructs (Noels, 2001; Csizér and Kormos, 2009; Jiang, 2011).

Parents may play a particularly significant part in children's English learning in China as, culturally, Chinese parents tend to believe that full involvement with their children's academic learning greatly assists their performance in academic subjects; parents' and teachers' roles complement each other so that, while Chinese students believe their teachers can be seen as guiding fathers or supportive mothers, parents can also be seen as the first instructors and home teachers of children before schooling (Cortazzi et al., 2009). Part of this sometimes pushy-parent role can be seen in the 'Tiger Moms' phenomenon, which has been widely publicised in the American media by Amy Chua's bestselling book, which puzzled, fascinated or appalled many western readers because of the extreme measures Chinese mothers can take to give a head start to their children's learning (Chua, 2011). Helping their offspring in this way can be interpreted in China as parental duty or shouldering an important family obligation (Sung and Padilla, 1998). Nevertheless, few empirical studies are designed to examine the role of Chinese parents in young learners' L2 motivation.

By surveying 293 Grade 4 students in two Nanjing primary schools together with interviewing their parents, Zhu and Zhang (2005) found that the parents' educational background was significantly related to their children's learning of English. In particular, mothers' English proficiency was found to be positively related to their children's English learning. Their study is consonant with the general belief that inevitably parents exert an impact on their children's academic performance and on L2 learning. However, it is still unclear precisely how parents participate in their children's L2 learning.

Further studies attempt to respond to this issue, although the participants were not the parents of young learners of English: Gao (2006) interviewed 24 mainland Chinese high school graduates who were admitted to undergraduate courses in Hong Kong, in order to investigate their learning experience before and after their arrival in Hong Kong. Results indicate how nearly all the students'

parents were involved with their children's English learning to a great extent: parents or other family members had impacted on these learners' attitudes towards English learning in a 'profound' manner. Gao (2006, p. 260) categorised parental involvement into six different types: language learning advocates, language facilitators, collaborators with teachers, language learning advisers, learning coercers and learning nurturers.

Jiang (2011) conducted a mixed-method study of 170 Year One English majors in one Chinese university, to explore the motivational profiles of these language learners. Survey results showed that the variable of 'parental encouragement' was the second most endorsed, indicating strong parental involvement in these students' English learning experience. Five informants were interviewed to ascertain memories of how parents had encouraged these learners: parental engagement included verbal communication (e.g. praise), full financial support (i.e. paying for after-school tuition or extra learning materials), rewards (e.g. for talking to foreigners in English) or even physical punishment (e.g. beating a child for not reading or memorising an English story).

Other researchers have investigated parental support for children's L2 learning in a different way. Wei (2011) used a questionnaire to focus on Chinese parental attitudes towards bilingual education in Shanghai by surveying the parents whose offspring were enrolled in bilingual courses compared with those in conventional courses. She found that both groups of parents believed that good knowledge of English could help their children's future career path, both groups apparently attributed the alleged 'deaf and mute English' (i.e. giving little attention to oral skill development) to inadequate teaching in schools and, for most of the parents, bilingual education was useful for their children's English proficiency. Like Gao (2006) and Jiang (2011), this study shows that Chinese parents are supportive of their children's English learning.

However, Kyriacou and Zhu (2008) claim that parents do not play such a positive role. Analysing 610 questionnaires and 64 interviews, they attempted to understand the impact of significant others (i.e. parents and teachers) on the motivation of L2 learners in secondary schools in Shanghai. They identified that these Chinese participants and their parents do not 'commonly' prioritise English as a course in which children should excel (p. 101) – perhaps this illustrates a downward trend of motivation with older age groups (see section 2.2).

Interestingly, the interview data shows how the parents had positively impacted on the students' L2 motivation, mostly by: (1) actively helping them to learn English; (2) showing how English proficiency had helped family members in their lives (or, conversely, how a lack of proficiency had hindered them); (3) providing financial and material support; (4) highlighting cultural experiences based on the use of English, including living abroad; and (5) conveying high expectations (p. 102). These interview findings (but not those of questionnaires) appear to confirm the studies that show a positive impact from parents on their children's English learning.

2.6 The research: gaps and questions

Studying motivations and expectations in language learning from social-psychological perspectives is a well-established research theme in western ELT (e.g. Gardner, 1985; Brophy, 1999; Eccles and Wigfield, 2002; Dornyei, 2003, 2005; Dornyei and Ushioda, 2009). Researchers look for intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of learners of English as a second language, to understand their needs and reasons for studying the target language. Expectations come from teachers, children themselves, peers, relatives, friends and their parents. High expectations may lead to higher achievement (Rubie-Davies et al. 2010).

There are few published research papers in China on the motivations and expectations of primary school English learners and their parents, as reviewed above. This leads to the two major research questions of this research project:

1. What motivates Chinese primary school pupils to learn English?
2. What are the expectations from their parents about learning English?

More specific questions about learning English, which help to investigate these questions, include:

- What are learners' feelings and motivations for learning?
- What affective factors are involved?
- What kinds of learning experiences have these learners had?
- What types of expectations do parents have regarding their child's English learning?

It is hoped that answers from these questions may help English teachers and educational policy makers to gain insights into these learners and their parents, who are key supporters in their children's English language learning contexts.

3

Research methods employed in this study

This study uses both established and more innovative research methods to ascertain the motivations, expectations and experiences of Chinese primary school learners of English, together with those of their parents. A more detailed explanation is given on the data collected using a more recently developed qualitative research method: elicited metaphor analysis.

3.1 Participating schools, and children with their parents, for the research

The data was collected from four city schools in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei province, located in central China. As explained earlier, since children now start to learn English in Chinese primary schools either from Y1 (age seven) or Y3 (age nine), two schools each starting the teaching of English from Y1 or Y3 were selected. In total, 128 pupils and their respective parents participated in this project.

These schools are coded as FJP and QPJ for Y1 pupils and LJS and WLL for Y3 pupils. Importantly, the selection of these four schools was considered carefully in order to achieve a degree of characteristic representation of different eras and features of Chinese primary schools.

The four schools represent many urban schools in China with similarities and differences in their history, school size, class sizes, curriculum speciality and children’s family backgrounds. Significantly, many schools in large cities – with ten million or more residents – receive ‘immigrant’ workers’ children. This means that their families have migrated from the countryside or small towns to urban areas. Large numbers of such migrants within China can impact on school populations, as reflected in our school samples. Surprisingly, however, the school with the most immigrant children actually offers the smallest class sizes – 35 or fewer children per class – while class sizes in other schools are normally 45 or more.

The ethical approval to obtain data from these parents and children was given by universities in the UK and China, and by local educational authorities, supported by head teachers and class teachers in all four schools. Children from the participating classes and their parents were randomly approached to be selected for the questionnaire and interviews, with a gender balance. All parents of participating children gave written consent.

Table 1: Summary information of the participating schools, parents and children (based on Jin et al., 2014)

Schools	FJP	QPJ	LJS	WLL
Established in	1960s	1940s	1980s	1950s
Historical period of school establishment	In the Cultural Revolution education was condemned	Before communist China was founded	China’s open door policy era	Strong promotion of Soviet socialist ideology
Participating year/ age/% of pupils	Y1/ age 7/ 18.75%	Y1/ age 7/ 13.15%	Y3/ age 9/ 23.43%	Y3/ age 9/ 10.34%
Total no. of students (and classes)	1,257 (29 classes)	1,375 (34 classes)	671 (19 classes)	1,780 (36 classes)
Features and specialities	Science and music	Fine arts, well known for Go playing, music	Fine arts and technology; small-sized classes	Physical education and music, known nationally
Parents’ education levels	60% + with degrees up to PhD	Relatively lower education levels	Relatively lower education levels	85% + with degrees up to PhD
Students’ social backgrounds	60% pupils in the catchment area with professional parents; 20% from migrant working families nearby; 20% from the non-catchment	80% from catchment families from all walks of life; 20% from the nearby migrant working families	45% pupils from migrant working families nearby; 55% pupils from factory workers’ families nearby	85% pupils from catchment professional families; 15% from families of military units (e.g. army hospitals)

3.2 Questionnaires for the participating children and parents

The questionnaire design considered the major motivation theories, embracing social, cognitive, educational, individual and cultural factors (e.g. Gardner 1985; Dörnyei 2005; Dörnyei et al. 2006; Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009, 2011).

Questionnaires were piloted to improve procedural matters (e.g. the original five-point Likert scale appeared to be confusing for young participants, and so it was changed to a three-point Likert scale).

The questionnaires contained three main parts in both a children's version and a parents' version. The Chinese version of the questionnaires was given to participants. The first part for each questionnaire covered personal information relating to the child and parent, including their ages, gender, educational background and occupations, income level, parental English level and English use, the child's time spent on the learning of English and any relevant financial input. The second part of the child's questionnaire contains four questions about their learning of English activities: watching English cartoons and movies, listening to English music and reading English comic books or cartoons. The third part of the child's questionnaire has 29 questions with a three-point Likert scale, which are broadly categorised into four aspects of their English learning motivations: affective (e.g. I like learning English), cognitive (e.g. learning English makes me knowledgeable), social (e.g. I like to talk with foreigners in English) and utilitarian (e.g. I have to learn English as it is one of the required courses).

The second part of the parents' questionnaire uses a five-point Likert scale to focus on their linguistic expectations including questions like 'My child likes English' (affective); 'I hope my child is able to communicate with English speakers fluently in the future' (social); 'Learning English is not easy for my child' (cognitive); and 'I think English should not be a compulsory subject in elementary education' (utilitarian). The third part of the parents' questionnaire concerns their non-linguistic expectations, with further questions on utilitarian aspects such as 'learning English is very important, because it is a requirement for employment' and 'because I hope my child can study abroad or emigrate abroad in the future'. These questions were based on current cultural, educational and social situations in China.

There are also open questions in the parents' interviews. These questions reinforce the questionnaire content, but move towards in-depth reasons for their answers (e.g. Why do you still require your child to learn English if she/he is unwilling to?).

For the children, a more innovative method – elicited metaphor analysis – was used to gain further insights into their motivations and attitudes towards the learning of English.

3.3 Elicited metaphor analysis

Lakoff's studies of metaphors in cognitive linguistics (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff, 1993) have shown that metaphors can be explored to reveal deeper thoughts of participants on concepts and views. Cortazzi and Jin (e.g. 1999, 2001) and Jin and Cortazzi (e.g. 2008, 2011, 2013) have been developing the use of metaphor analysis as a research method to investigate perceptions about learning, teaching, language, concepts of dyslexia, curriculum subject learning, intercultural business communication and motivations for learning English. The present metaphor analysis method aims to elicit three elements from the informants. They are: first, a 'target domain' which is abstract, referring to the conceptual thoughts the researcher seeks to obtain from the informant (e.g. about 'learning'); second, a 'source domain' which is a concrete image the informant gives to resemble key features of the concept (e.g. comparing learning to 'a roller coaster'); and third, an 'entailment' clarifying the reasons or underlying meanings of the relationship between the target and source (e.g. 'because learning is always ups and downs with happiness and difficulties'). Thus participants are given a particular concept (like 'learning') for which they give their own concrete images and reasons for the comparison. A child's example is thus: 'Learning is ... a rollercoaster because it is always ups and downs with happiness and difficulties.'

This method has proved useful to engage young participants or those who may have difficulties in expressing abstract thoughts at a deeper level (Jin et al. 2013). Further, a set of elicitation methods has been developed by using cards, picture stories, games, cartoons, drawings and role play, to help involve participants in a familiar environment. It also enables participants to be engaged cognitively, affectively and socially.

For this study, some initial training was given to the 128 participating children to help them understand what a metaphor or simile means and the necessity for giving reasons for their metaphors by using familiar concepts, such as: 'What is your mother like?'; 'My mother is like a flower, because she is beautiful.' For the metaphor elicitation, children in small groups played games with coloured cards, pictures or role plays to create a relaxed and encouraging environment. The main elicitation questions asked were: 'Why do you want to learn English?' and 'What is it like for you to learn English?' Then children were given a prompt: Learning English is like ... because.... 362 metaphors were generated by 65 Y1 children and 63 Y3 children with approximately equal gender numbers. All the interviews were conducted in Chinese.

4

Findings

Our findings are reported by presenting the child questionnaire data first and then their metaphor data analysis; the analysis will then turn to the parents' questionnaire and interview data results.

4.1 Findings from the child questionnaire

The questionnaire data shows that 59.3 per cent of the participants had experience of communicating with people from English-speaking countries. 96.9 per cent listened to English songs, while 54 per cent read cartoon books in English. 31.6 per cent students often or always watch English movies and animations. These relatively high percentages of English language

inputs demonstrate how English learning occurs in their daily life in addition to their classroom learning.

Regarding the reliability of the three-point Likert scale questionnaire items ('1'='disagree', '2'='no opinion' and '3'='agree'), Cronbach's alpha coefficient was measured. It was found that this coefficient reached as high as 0.70, which indicates a high reliability among the questionnaire items.

Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics of each item using the three-point Likert scale, including the (arithmetic) mean (M), median (which is 3 for all) and standard deviation (SD).

Table 2: Descriptive data of all student questionnaire items

Child questionnaire items	M	SD
1 I like learning English.	2.82	0.51
2 I learn English because my classmates are better at English.	2.52	0.79
3 Learning English makes me knowledgeable.	2.84	0.50
4 I like to talk with foreigners in English.	2.14	0.88
5 Learning English is one of the most important things in my life.	2.45	0.79
6 I don't think that English is an important subject in school.	2.65	0.72
7 My mum often says that English is important for my future.	2.62	0.75
8 My parents will be proud if I can learn English well.	2.80	0.54
9 English is not important in the world. (converted to positive)	2.84	0.51
10 I will learn English even if it is not compulsory.	2.73	0.60
11 It is not easy for me to learn English. (converted to positive)	2.18	0.94
12 My dad does not believe that English is an important subject in school.	2.71	0.62
13 People around me believe that learning English is a waste of time.	2.90	0.33
14 I often imagine speaking good English.	2.61	0.71
15 I hope to learn many languages.	2.58	0.76
16 I will try my best to learn English.	2.90	0.35
17 Learning English is fun.	2.84	0.48
18 I can travel around the world if I learn English well.	2.57	0.78
19 My dad thinks that I should learn English well.	2.77	0.55
20 I think that English learning is helpful for my future.	2.91	0.37
21 I always like to have English classes.	2.75	0.56
22 I have to learn English as it is one of the required courses.	2.32	0.93
23 English will be useful if I travel abroad.	2.87	0.44
24 For me, a learned person should learn English.	2.75	0.62
25 Learning English is to pass exams.	1.74	0.95
26 I am glad to attend English activities if there are any.	2.75	0.56
27 I think that learning English is interesting.	2.89	0.38
28 Learning English is important as it is one requirement for compulsory education.	2.56	0.76
29 People around me will be disappointed if I do not learn English well.	2.51	0.81

Table 2 results indicate that the top five most endorsed items are items 20, 13, 16, 27 and 23 (M=2.91, 2.9, 2.9, 2.89 and 2.87 respectively) and their patterns are consistent over all the dataset (SD=0.37, 0.33, 0.35, 0.38 and 0.44 respectively). This means that most of the participants believed that learning English is interesting, helpful and important for their future study. Also, English is useful for future travelling. They will try their best to learn English well. Their views show both intrinsic and pragmatic reasons for learning English.

However, the least endorsed items are items 5, 22, 11, 4 and 25 (M=2.45, 2.32, 2.18, 2.14 and 1.74), although these participants seem to disagree with each other (SD=0.79, 0.93, 0.94, 0.88 and 0.94). Apparently, they hold ambivalent attitudes towards English learning. This point seems to be supported from the metaphor data, which will be discussed below. The result for the question (No. 25) on 'learning English is for passing the exam' is particularly interesting as it provoked the most diverse views from these young learners in the whole questionnaire (SD=0.95). This may indicate that Chinese children of these age groups have a more complex way of thinking regarding English (it is not just for exams, it is for life, but you do need to pass English exams) and this ambiguity or disagreement may provide some insights for professionals, to see how this diverse thinking can be maintained from the age group onwards.

4.1.1 School year differences

The descriptive analysis showed a mixed pattern in terms of the motivation-related items (see Figure 1). The results show that Y3 tend to disagree more with the given statements than Y1. Apparently this fits with the general findings from others' research (e.g. Enever, 2011) that older learners tend to lose

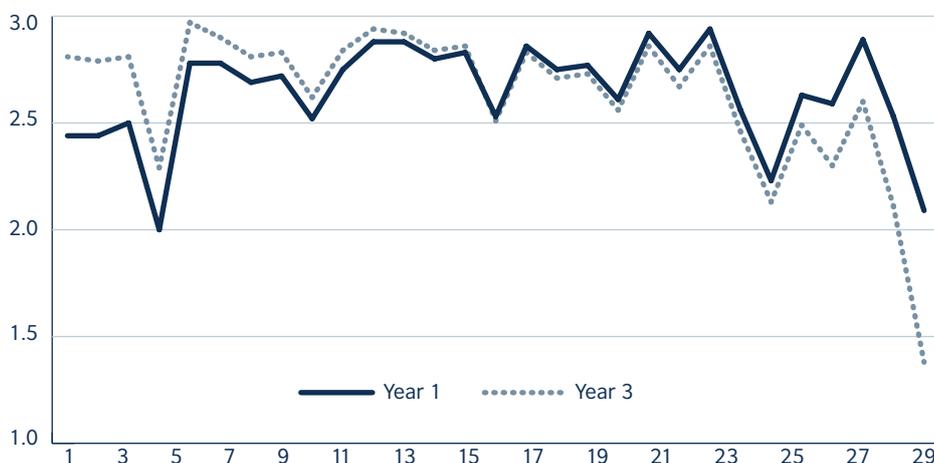
their earlier English learning motivation, due to the change of learning environment with more challenging tasks, peer pressure and other factors. However, our finding seems to show how older learners are able to express more varied views on English since here both groups had studied English for only six months before the interviews. Again, the metaphor data shows a pattern consistent with the questionnaire data, that Y3 group participants show more dynamic motivations.

Specifically, the Y1 respondents expressed more agreement with items 22, 24 and 25 than the Y3 ones. Y1 children tend to have stronger compliance with the current decisive role of English in Chinese education contexts (i.e. passing exams) and, in their mind, English learning seems to be more closely linked to becoming a learned person. However, as might be expected, Y3 children in items 6, 7 and 14 showed more willingness to talk to foreigners, a stronger desire to become competent English users, and were more aware of the role of English in the curriculum.

One interesting phenomenon is that Y1 children realised the importance of English in compulsory education and the examination system to a greater extent than Y3, but Y3 learners seemed to have a stronger awareness of English in the curriculum system. This difference may be partly explained since the sampled schools of Y3 (WLL and LJS) start to offer English learning in Y3 while FJP and QPJ give English courses from Y1. As a new course, Y3 students tend to be more focused on English and thus, for them, English might seem important for the curriculum.

Independent T-tests were conducted to ascertain any statistical differences between Y1 and Y3 students. The result showed no statistical differences between the groups except for a significant

Figure 1: Comparison of Y1 and Y3 students' motivational trends



difference in their views on learning English for passing exams ($p=0.000$): Y3 demonstrated a less likely association of English learning with passing exams, which is perhaps a surprise, because they are closer in age to taking such exams; in fact, it seems remarkable that either age group would show any awareness of exams for English at all at this early stage (this reflects an exam-centred orientation even in primary schools).

4.1.2 School differences

FJP and QPJ (Y1): The descriptive analysis showed that children in both FJP and QPJ answered these questionnaire items in a similar way, although there were differences (see Figure. 2).

Children in both schools expressed nearly the same positive views about the intention to learn English and to invest effort in learning, particularly because this language plays an important role in the world. However, they seemed to express related but different views about the role of English in education and the potential reaction from their parents if they could speak good English: the FJP children appeared to be more concerned about the role of English in

compulsory education and about learning English for passing examinations, whereas the QPJ children gave greater endorsement to the idea that their parents would be proud if their children could use English properly. The overall similarity of response patterns from both schools was confirmed by the follow-up independent t-tests: there were no significant differences between the FJP and QPJ schools.

WLL and LJS (Y3): Nevertheless, the response patterns in Y3 seemed more diversified. Using independent t-tests, the two schools differ significantly on items 11 and 24 (LJS, 2.60, 2.93; WLL, 1.70, 2.30, $p<0.000$, 0.001 respectively), which means that in comparison with the WLL children, those in LJS found that learning English was not a challenging task and that competence in English should be one of the prerequisites of being knowledgeable – perhaps this reflects a local ethos of learning. It may be related to the family backgrounds of the children: WLL parents tend to have a higher educational background than that of LJS parents; the former may have higher expectations and demands for their child’s English learning achievement. However, for other items, the two groups did not differ much.

Figure 2: Y1 Students’ motivation in FJP and QPJ primary schools

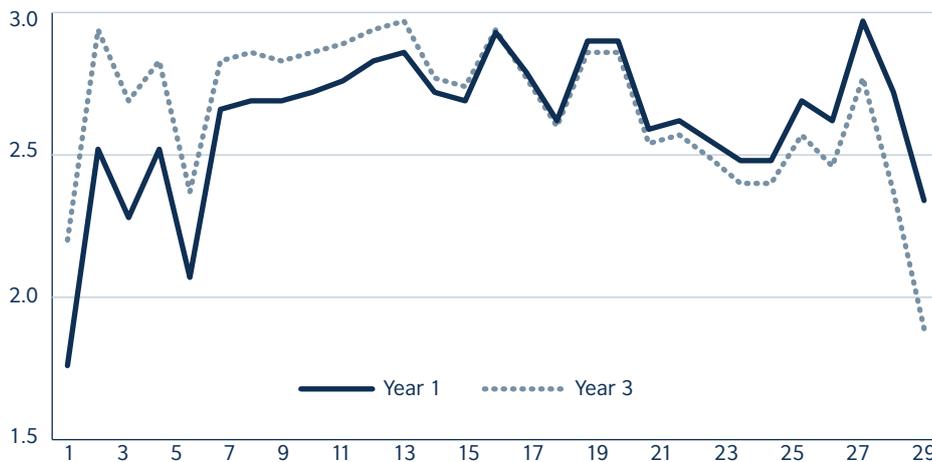
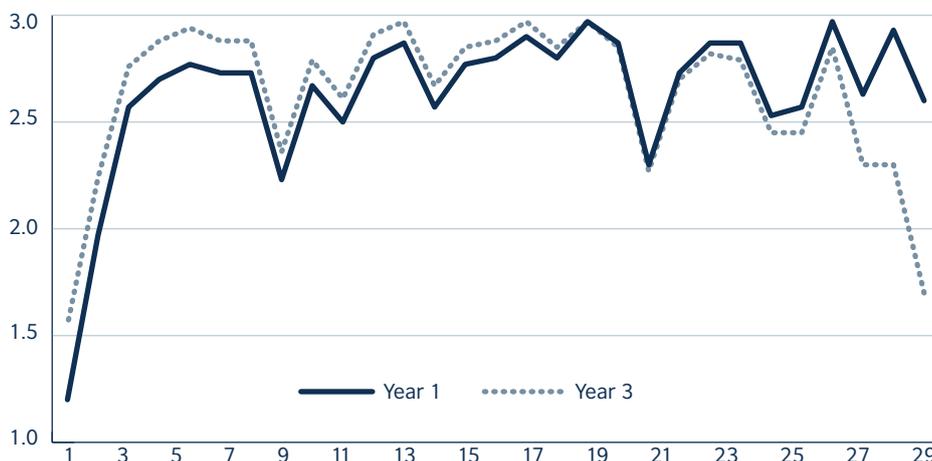


Figure 3: Y3 Students’ motivation in LJS and WLL primary schools



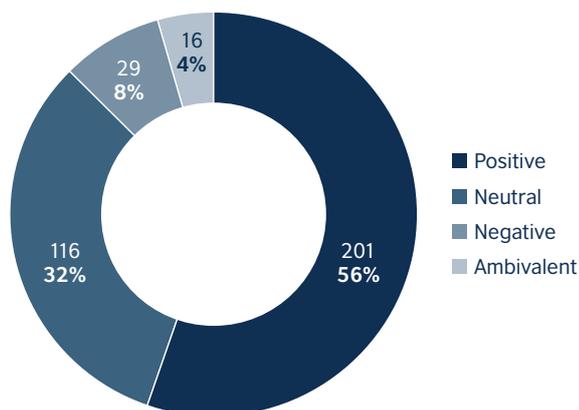
4.2 Findings from the elicited metaphors and entailments

The metaphor analysis findings are based on the transcribed and translated data, which was then categorised by naturally occurring themes. The types of metaphors were identified in relation to motivations for learning English. These reflected the attitudes of the participating learners. The patterns of children's reasons for learning English were analysed through their entailments, following the metaphors created by them. These give insights into the children's motivations for learning English.

4.2.1 Attitudes towards learning English through metaphors

Metaphors created by these children are classified into positive, negative, neutral or ambivalent metaphors according to their attitudes towards learning English conveyed in both metaphor and entailments. Their distribution is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Types of metaphors based on learners' attitudes towards learning English (Jin et al., 2014)



4.2.1.1 Positive metaphors

Positive metaphors clearly make up the largest group. This indicates that, at the beginning of English learning, a majority of children here have encouraging attitudes that help with their learning process. Many positive metaphors indicate that participants gain enjoyment in learning English and readily show an obvious fondness for it at the current stage of learning. For example:

Metaphor	Entailment
A motorcycle racing game in an amusement arcade	Because English learning is great fun.
Noodles	I like eating them.

Some positive metaphors suggest that participants recognise the instrumental value in English and consider their English learning experience pleasant and helpful:

Metaphor	Entailment
Wings of happiness	I could fly to other countries if I had wings.
A golden key	The key can open the door of knowledge.

Other participants state clearly that they are satisfied with their ability to learn English; for them English is easy to learn and they are confident of their future success with English:

Metaphor	Entailment
A leopard running fast	A leopard runs fast; I make great progress in language learning.
Singing relaxing music	English is very simple, and it is very easy to learn.

A cross-check shows that this generally positive view of English expressed in metaphors is entirely consistent with findings from the top five most endorsed questionnaire items (items 20, 13, 16, 27 and 23), confirming how most participants believed that English learning is interesting and helpful for their academic learning as well as for practical purposes in the future.

4.2.1.2 Neutral metaphors

63 pupils (49 per cent, out of 128) from four schools created 116 neutral metaphors (32 per cent, out of 362) as the second largest type. Neutral metaphors describe factual matters to explain learners' views without personal evaluation or commitment. Some participants use interesting metaphors to describe a broad spectrum of potential knowledge through learning English. For example:

Metaphor	Entailment
An immense sea	There is a great deal of water in the sea, and also English contains a lot of knowledge, just like the immense sea.
A rainbow	A rainbow has many colours just like our learning. The teacher teaches us how to make a dialogue (in English). Conversation is like the red colour. Learning the alphabet is like the orange colour; playing games is like the yellow colour.

Some pupils indicate that learning English has become a normal part of their routine, just like having rice or changing clothes every day:

Metaphor	Entailment
Clothes	We have to read and listen to English every day, just like we must put on clothes every day.
Our daily life	We have to do it (learn English) every day.

Many participants who give neutral metaphors realise that learning English is a long and slow process which requires patience and persistence:

Metaphor	Entailment
A long staircase	Because it (English) requires us to learn it slowly.
Building blocks	English knowledge is cumulative; just like blocks it can only be built bit by bit.

The findings in this category strongly indicate how these young learners have more realistic thoughts than might be anticipated. They view their learning as a process in a surprisingly practical or sanguine manner: learning English can be a vast enterprise, so you need to learn slowly, bit by bit.

4.2.1.3 Negative metaphors

Eight per cent of the metaphors in this dataset reveal negative perceptions, which show how a few children dislike learning English. They feel it is unpleasant, difficult, depressing or even harmful. Examples give some indication why they feel this – the range of perceived needed knowledge makes learning English challenging and difficult to remember. There are risks, but it remains unclear what the negative consequences of risks might be and why a few think learning English is 'evil'.

Metaphor	Entailment
Grass in the field	There are numerous grasses in the field, and also English has a wide range of knowledge. It is difficult to learn it well.
Leaves on the tree	English words are numerous, and I can never remember them.
Hong Tailang (a character in the Chinese animated cartoon Xi Yangyang)	Hong Tailang is evil.
Gathering honey	Gathering honey is not easy; you have to take the risk of being stung.
Like flower dying	If the flower is not put in water, it will die.

It is important to explore these aspects further, to ascertain the nature of any negative experiences, and to show how this small group formed these attitudes and how they affect their learning motivation.

4.2.1.4 Ambivalent metaphors

Nine pupils (seven per cent, out of 128) generated 16 ambivalent metaphors (four per cent, out of 362), among which 14 are given by seven Y3 students from one primary school. Ambivalent metaphors express a dilemma in what learning English means to these pupils: they consider this a daunting learning task and emphasise the difficulty and complexity of learning processes; yet, they are well aware of the importance of learning English and the great effort required to achieve success. For example:

Metaphor	Entailment
A torrential river	Sometimes it (English) is difficult to learn; it blocks your way. However, if you learn it with a willing heart, you can cross the river safely.
A rock lying in the middle of the road	If you fail to recognise some English words, they will become a huge rock blocking your way. However, you must try to challenge the difficulty. Only in this way can the huge rock be removed.

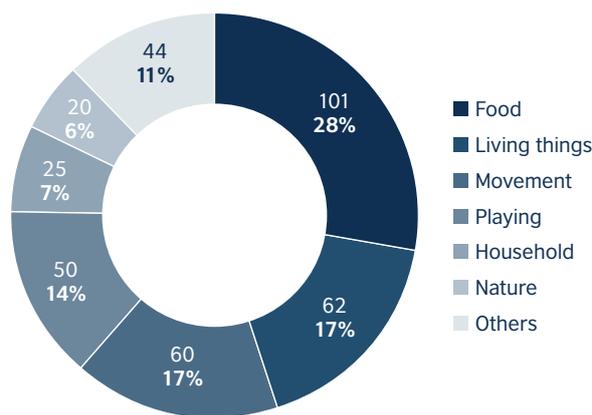
Clearly, motivation plays a significant role in the process of learning a language. Some ambivalent metaphors indicate how the approval of significant others such as teachers and parents can influence children's attitudes and enhance their self-motivation to learn English:

Metaphor	Entailment
Sweet and sour candy	When I was asked to answer teacher's questions and I could not offer the right answer, I felt learning English is sour; when I could answer teacher's questions and was praised by my teacher, I felt very happy and thought English learning is sweet.
Swimming	If you don't learn you will sink. Mother will be happy to see me study it (English).

4.2.2 Types of metaphors created by participating children

Lakoff (1987, p. 388) explains that a metaphor is the expression of an understanding of one concept in terms of another concept, where there is some similarity or correlation between the two. In this research, a metaphor can be a word or phrase for an object, activity or idea given by child participants, which is used as a symbol of learning English in order to show a comparison. According to the objects/activities/ideas (the source) that children used to compare learning English (the target), we reclassified 362 metaphors into seven superordinate categories with sub-categories within each. The metaphor categories naturally produced are: food metaphors (e.g. food snacks, drink, fruit, vegetables), living things (e.g. humans, animals, plants), movement/travel (e.g. sports, movement, travel, transportation), all kinds of playing (e.g. general or specific items), household items (e.g. for daily use, furniture, appliances, stationery, clothing) and nature, as well as 44 unclassified others (e.g. barriers, learning, working, tool/instrument, etc.). Figure 5 shows the numbers and percentages of the seven kinds of metaphors respectively.

Figure 5: Types of metaphors based on source domains involved (Jin et al., 2014)



4.2.2.1 Metaphors using food and drink

The category of familiar items of food and drink has the highest number of metaphors (see Figure. 5) represented by participants' favourite food, drink, fruit and vegetables. These food metaphors may signify children's positive feelings and attachment towards learning English, which reveal learners' affective attitudes expressed through the fundamental and familiar category of food.

Metaphor	Entailment
Rice	Because English is as delicious and fun as rice.
Chocolate	Because chocolate is sweet. That's how English feels.
Milk	Because it can give us more nutrients.
Apples	Because there are red, yellow and green apples. It's very interesting and I can learn many English words.
Cabbages	Because cabbages can provide us with nutrients, just as English learning can provide us with knowledge.

4.2.2.2 Metaphors using living things

Animals, birds, people, plants and flowers are used to compare children's motivations towards learning. Their generally positive feelings and attitudes are shown in their choices and entailments of the metaphors; most are familiar, while others are more exotic but typically represented in a child's world in schools or homes.

Metaphor	Entailment
A know-it-all	Because a person can use (English) in many countries.
A beautiful butterfly	Because it can accompany us and play various games with us.
A flower	Because it can be appreciated.

4.2.2.3 Metaphors representing movement or travel

The travel and movement metaphors are relatively common ones when children describe their learning process. Noticeably, this connects with ‘learning is a journey’, the hugely significant kind of general metaphor in Jin and Cortazzi’s analysis of Chinese university students’ learning (2011). This type of metaphor indicates learners’ awareness of such a learning process involving direction, movement and purpose to reach a goal, and of the effort they have to put into learning to achieve success.

Metaphor	Entailment
A know-it-all	Because people walk slowly and the process is slow.
An express train	Because it can take us to the UK and the USA.
A bus	Because it is of great help to us.

4.2.2.4 Metaphors referring to playing or leisure

This type of metaphor mainly expressed children’s perceptions of English and why they want to learn it. Some participants compare learning English to playing in general terms; others compare this learning to a specific kind of playing or leisure activity, such as playing with toys. While learning through play is well established in western early years’ education, this is less the case in China after kindergarten level, so arguably these metaphors strongly confirm a sense of fun and enjoyment and likely indicate how these children are self-motivated to learn English.

Metaphor	Entailment
A happy game	Because games are great fun and so is learning English.
Making strawberry cake	Because it can bring us lots of fun.
An adorable teddy bear toy	Because it can make me happy.
Building blocks	Because knowledge building is like building blocks piece by piece. I learn knowledge when I finish playing.

4.2.2.5 Nature, household items and the remaining unclassified metaphors

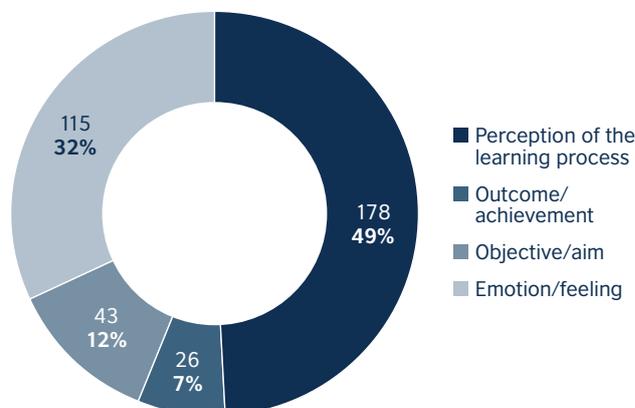
The remaining types of metaphors appear to show how learners have an awareness of the essential and beneficial aspects of learning English, which are seen as rewards for hard work and the struggle to learn, with overtones of positive feelings towards this long-term process – again, these features have surprisingly strong resonance with Chinese university students’ images of learning English (Jin and Cortazzi, 2011).

Metaphor	Entailment
An ocean	Because the knowledge of English is as deep and wide as the ocean.
An umbrella	Because umbrella can protect us from raining, and when I talk to people I can use English.
A watch	Because the learning (process) is very slow.
A book	Because it teach me much more knowledge.
A medal	Because I will be rewarded if I learn it well.

4.2.3 Interpreting pupils’ perceptions through examining the entailments

Entailments express participants’ underlying meanings of the metaphors children give for learning by showing the reason for making the comparison between the target and source. Examining the entailments for all the metaphors shows that pupils’ motivations for learning English may be interpreted from four aspects: perceptions of learning processes; affective factors; objectives, purposes or goals of learning English; and perceived achievable outcomes. Figure 6 shows the patterns of reasons for learning English through analysis of the entailments of the children’s metaphors.

Figure 6: Numbers and percentages of different kinds of entailments



4.2.3.1 Perceptions of the learning process

178 entailments of the metaphors are related to the children's perceptions of English learning processes. Even these young participants recognise that learning English is a long process that takes a great deal of time and effort, and that as learners they will gradually get access to all kinds of knowledge of English at varying stages. Some entailments indicate that a playful and encouraging approach to teaching English can help pupil participants build confidence and foster interest in the language, which is crucial for these young learners' intrinsic motivation and successful acquisition of English. Examples can be seen in the following entailments:

Metaphor	Entailment
Sushi	Because the process of making Sushi is interesting, like the process of learning English.
Tasty yoghurt	The flavour of yoghurt needs to be tasted slowly, and also English should be learned slowly in order to learn it well.
A pizza	Because it comprises different parts like various lessons (in English).
Racing	Because my English teacher asks us to do English vocabulary test every time.
A medal	Because I will be rewarded if I learn it well.

4.2.3.2 Outcome/achievement

26 entailments of the metaphors state achievable outcomes of learning English, emphasising the usefulness of English as an important instrument to acquire knowledge: some children believe that learning English is not just a matter of remembering words and grammar, but that the language as a medium constitutes an important source of knowledge. This finding accords with the questionnaire result that English learning is closely linked to becoming a learned person, especially in the minds of Y1 children. Examples of entailments that state outcomes/achievements are:

Metaphor	Entailment
Cabbages	Because cabbages can provide us with nutrients, just as English learning can provide us with knowledge.
A nutritious egg	Because it provides us with lots of different knowledge.
A book	Because it teaches me much more knowledge.

4.2.3.3 Objectives/purposes

43 entailments of the metaphors explain the objectives/purposes of learning English. For both Y1 and Y3 learners, communication with foreigners in English and travelling to foreign countries are long-term motivations for learning English. These young children thus have a positive view of English as a useful instrument for cross-cultural communication and international mobility. Examples of entailments that explain objectives/purposes of learning English are:

Metaphor	Entailment
A mobile phone	Because we can communicate with foreigners if we learn English well.
An aeroplane	Because an aeroplane can take me anywhere, and I want to study English in other countries.
A beautiful flower	Because it can attract many tourists.
A meal	Because it can feed people.

4.2.3.4 Emotion/feeling

Affective factors play a significant role in language learning; there is abundant evidence that positive affective factors promote learning, while negative ones block the way to effective learning. In the metaphor data, 115 entailments are related to affective factors, most of which show participants' positive views of learning English, experienced, in metaphors, especially through the senses: it is 'sweet', 'delicious', 'smells' and 'tastes' good, and brings 'happiness'. Examples of entailments describing such emotions and feelings for learning English are:

Metaphor	Entailment
A mango	Because a mango has a unique flavour. It's sweet and tasty just like English.
Doughnuts	Because we can be as happy as if I am surrounded by doughnuts every day.
A lollipop	Because learning English is sweet.
Dry sesame noodles (a kind of local breakfast in Wuhan)	Because dry sesame noodles are delicious and smell good.
Playing happily	Because learning English makes me feel the happiness of study.

4.2.3.5 Comparing different schools and age groups

The four sample schools each have distinguishing characteristics due to their history, political and social establishment, community location and educational emphasis. However, they also mirror common features of different types of primary schools in Wuhan and other Chinese cities (see Table 1 for the summary of school features). Figure 7 shows the spread of different metaphor evaluations of learning English between the four primary schools and thus between the two age groups: children in the FJP and QPJ samples are in Y1, while those in LJS and WLL are in Y3.

30 Y1 children from FJP created 66 valid metaphors, among which 36 are positive, 22 neutral, seven negative and one ambivalent; while 35 Y1 children from QPJ created 88 valid metaphors, among which 32 are positive, 39 neutral, 16 negative and one ambivalent. There is no significant difference shown in attitudes towards learning between the two schools except that learners from QPJ have more metaphor expressions about difficulties and frustrations they may encounter in learning. Examples of negative metaphors collected from QPJ primary school that show difficulties and dangers include:

Metaphor	Entailment
Running	Everyone stands on same scratch line. It's easy at the beginning; then it becomes more and more difficult.
The high jump	Because EL will become more and more difficult (just like the high jump competition).
Jump off a building	If you climb the stairs badly, you will fall down.

In LJS and WLL primary schools children start learning English in Y3. 30 LJS participants generated 87 metaphors, among which 79 are positive, seven neutral and one negative; 33 Y3 English beginners from WLL created 121 metaphors, among which 54 are positive, 48 neutral, five negative and 14 ambivalent. Notably, participants from LJS generated the highest percentage of positive metaphors (91 per cent) among the four schools. They also give proportionately many more food metaphors – for which there is no obvious reason, but this demonstrates the possibility of local variations that might be significant contextual features in further research. Few participants claimed that learning English was unpleasant or

Figure 7: Comparing four primary school students' attitudes towards English through metaphors

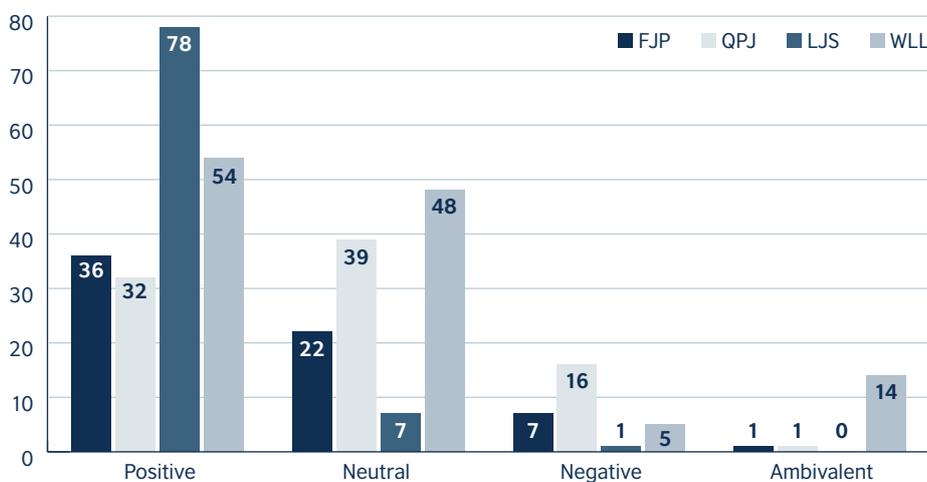
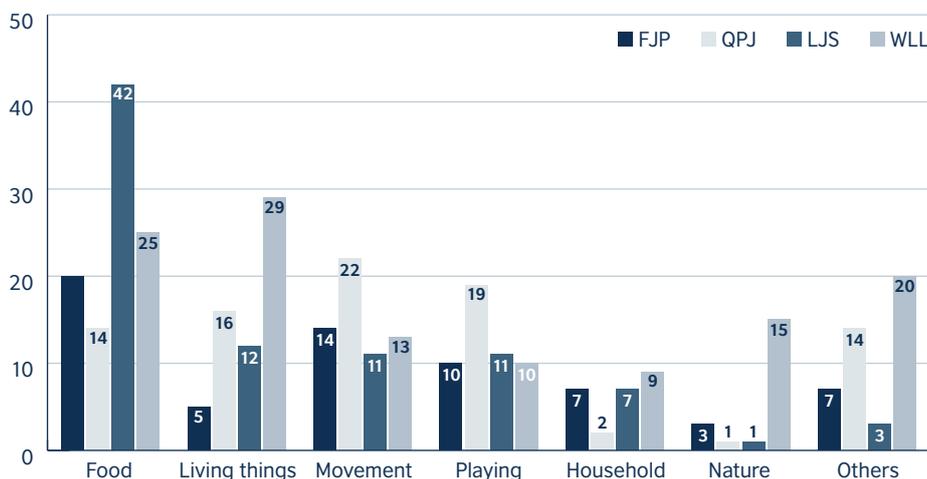


Figure 8: Comparing different types of metaphors among the four primary schools



difficult. LJS is well known for its small class size, with the student number under 35 in each class. This may contribute to learners' classroom environment, although small class size alone does not ensure effective teaching and successful acquisition of English, since many other variables, such as teaching quality, the children's home environment, the quality of the curriculum or school leadership, may also make a difference in learners' motivation and attitude. It is worthwhile noting that an overwhelming majority (14 out of 16) of ambivalent metaphors are given by seven Y3 learners in WLL. These ambivalent metaphors express a dilemma and may show a more complex awareness about what learning English means in children's experience.

Children in WLL create a particular kind of metaphor that places the participants actively into their creation and reveals some consciousness of learners regarding the relationship between learning English and themselves; notably, these metaphors describe the learners themselves in active first-person roles in the process of learning English, such as that of 'a busy bee collecting and storing sweet honey'.

Metaphor	Entailment
A flower	I am like a little bee, collecting knowledge on the flower every day.
A sea	I am like a dolphin, swimming in the sea.
A lighter	I am like a candle, I never learnt English before; it (the lighter) sparks with English knowledge to pass it me (the candle).
A honeycomb	I store the collected knowledge in the honeycomb.

4.3 Findings from parental expectations of four primary schools

This section will report the findings from both the questionnaire and interview results involving the parents (and some grandparents) of the pupil participants.

4.3.1 Survey of parents' expectations of learning English

4.3.1.1 Descriptive analysis

All adult survey respondents were parents or grandparents of the children participants (N=128); 128 copies of questionnaires were distributed, of which 106 were valid for the analysis, representing 83 per cent of the target parent population. Female parents (N=77; 72.6 per cent) were the majority, aged between 31 and 40 years old (age 31–35, 36.8 per cent; 36–40, 42.5 per cent); seven respondents were the grandparents of the child participants, aged above 50.

These gender proportions and different generations included here can be attributed to Chinese child care customs (a large majority of fathers are working, as are many mothers, and grandparents are commonly involved in care) and they show how parental urban working patterns affect their ability to participate in school activities and therefore in this research.

A majority of the parents/grandparents (73.6 per cent) reported that they had the 'Hukou' (the status of official residence registration) in Wuhan, the city where the research was conducted, while the rest officially resided outside in smaller cities or counties but were living in the city (this reflects the recent migration to cities in China). Their education backgrounds apparently demonstrate a common pattern. Most of them, and their spouses (93.4 per cent; 98.1 per cent respectively), had received some post-secondary education, while a few had higher degrees of MA/MSc or PhD (<0.5 per cent). In addition, these families (86.9 per cent) reported an average or higher than average annual income in Wuhan, ranging between ¥30,000 and ¥150,000 (a current sterling exchange rate of £3,000 and £15,000).

Many respondents believed their self-assessed English proficiency was limited or intermediate (47.2 per cent; 48.1 per cent). Only 18.9 per cent of the respondents reported that they might use English in life 'occasionally'; the rest claimed that they did not use it or used it rarely. Given their own modest or quite limited English attainments, the parental investment in their children's English learning is quite striking – most of the families claimed to spend about ¥1,000 to ¥5,000 annually on English learning for their child (for some this may include an element of claiming the social and financial status of being able to afford this expense for their children's aspirations).

The statistical findings show that most parents believe that learning English is an important benefit for their child's education and for their future, and so they encourage their child to learn English well. They do not believe that the learning of English will impair their children's proficiency in Chinese, nor that learning Chinese costs more than learning English in terms of time and family resources (although they think learning English does not consume much time). They believe their children have sufficient English reading skills. However, Standard Deviation results show that their responses diverge greatly on questions regarding the sequence of learning English and Chinese, the role of the English language in the various entrance examinations in the education system in China, and regarding compulsory requirements for children to learn English.

4.3.1.2 Inferential analysis

Data regarding parents' ages and income, and the financial support they dedicate to their children's learning of English, and other background data, displays a complex pattern. From a correlational analysis, the relationship between family educational background and parents' annual income was not found to be statistically significant in relation to their children's starting age for learning English and parental investment in learning English.

Interestingly, especially in light of the widespread evidence-based perception in the West that the social and educational background of parents makes a difference to language and literacy learning, this factor appears to play a less significant role in these Chinese parents' attitudes towards their children's learning of English. Independent t-tests found that parents with a higher education background (a university degree) and those with lower education levels appear to express similar opinions about their children's learning of English. The only significant difference ($p=0.00$) is that parents with lower education achievements are likely to believe that their children spend less time on English than Chinese, although both cohorts claim that more time has been invested in Chinese learning. This is unsurprising, given the complexity of written Chinese and the heavy proportion of curriculum time devoted to Chinese literacy in primary schools. It is likely that parents give full support for this at home and, of course, parents of this generation are all literate in Chinese, but not necessarily in English.

The gender of the respondents also has little distinctive impact on their opinions about learning English. Even though the number of female participants ($n=77$) is nearly three times as many as that of the males ($n=29$), they seem to express similar

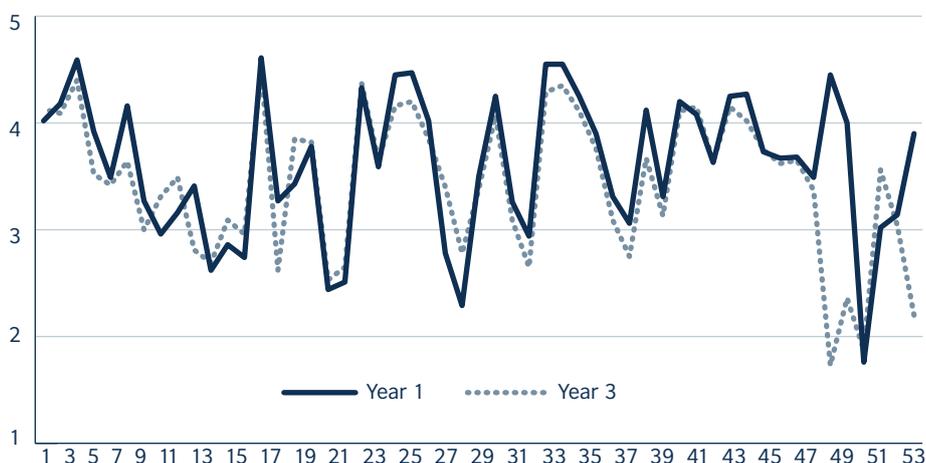
attitudes towards children's English learning ($\text{sig}>0.05$). Thus, these parents all recognise the importance of the English language in their young children's future career, for their general development and for global workforce markets. In addition, they appear to hold comparably positive attitudes towards English learning, and correspondingly high expectations of their children's English skills.

4.3.1.3 Different expectations of parents with children of different year groups

While the responses of parents from schools with Y1 and Y3 learners showed a similar pattern, these did not exclude prominent variations. The descriptive analyses showed that most of the mean differences for questionnaire items fell between $+0.50$ and -0.50 , suggesting that these parents held common and consistent ideas about the decisive role of English in their children's education or future career, and thus they expressed similar positive attitudes towards their children's English learning – from an outsider's perspective it is interesting that so many of these Chinese parents would consider their children's job prospects at all in this way, given the young age of the children.

These findings have been confirmed by the follow-up independent t-tests. However, the parents of Y3 children seemed to be more concerned about the negative impact of English learning on Chinese learning than those of Y1 – possibly because by Y3 learning Chinese is more established and a more serious element in the curriculum compared to Y1. More notably, the parents of Y1 children believed that learning English was not a waste of time and it had a practical value, and thus it should be important for their children's future; while the parents of Y3 appeared to hold an opposite view (parents of Y1 means=4.45, 4.00, 3.90; parents of Y3 means=1.73,

Figure 9: Parental expectations of Y1 and Y3 children



2.36, 2.20). These complex results reflect parents' ambivalent attitudes towards learning English, especially the parents of Y3, which might have influenced their children's attitudes (see the results of Y3 children in both questionnaire and metaphor data). However, this ambivalence did not mean that they would stop their children from learning English. On the contrary, nearly all of the parents invested effort and material wealth into encouraging and helping their children to learn the language.

4.3.1.4 School differences

The parents of Y1 children in both schools expressed positive views about the possible role of English in their children's future career and education, and positive attitudes towards their children's English learning. Hence, these parents tried to encourage English learning in many ways. However,

the respondents in QPJ expected their children to learn more English by signing up for after-school training courses and buying extra-curriculum course books, while parents in FJP put their faith in the availability of optional extra English courses.

The questionnaire responses (Figure. 11) of parents of Y3 children from WLL and LJS demonstrate no statistically significant differences through T-tests. Parents from both schools give verbal encouragement to their children to learn English, as they have a clear awareness of the potential usefulness of the language in their children's future education. However, the participants in WLL seemed to hold the view about learning English to make China prosperous to a lesser extent than their counterparts in LJS. Another difference is that LJS parents appeared to disagree more about the usefulness of English for their children's future job prospects.

Figure 10: Parental expectations in FJP and QPJ primary schools

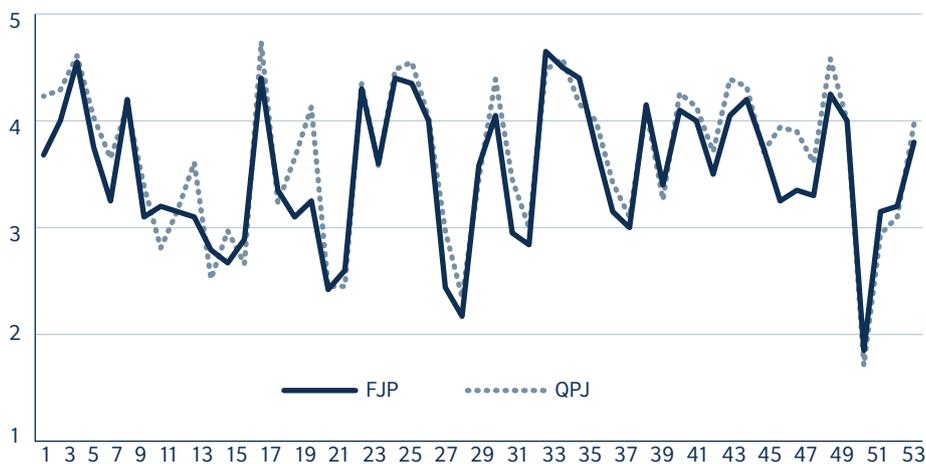
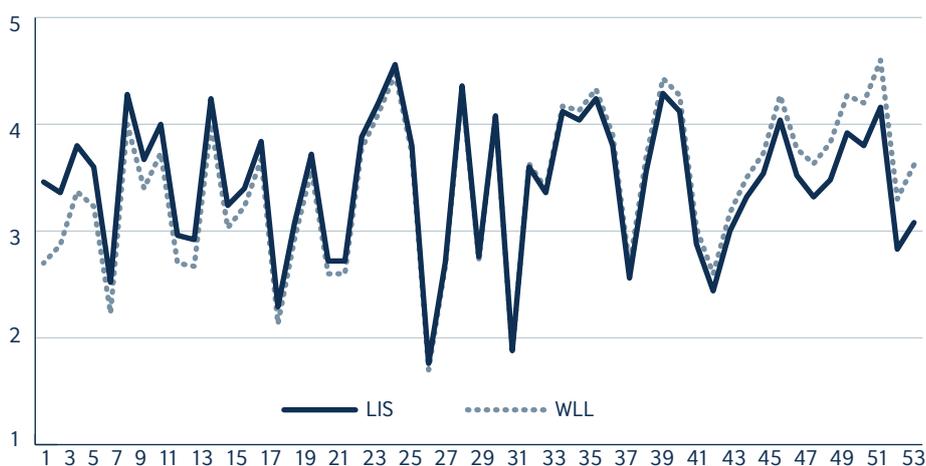


Figure 11: Parental expectations in WLL and LJS primary schools



4.3.2 Interview findings from parents

4.3.2.1 Six aspects of parental expectations through interviews

The parent interview data is classified into six aspects of parental expectations: language skills; gaining opportunities; syllabus-level satisfaction; individual happiness in learning; blind positivity of expectations; and no particular expectation or requirement towards young learners. These are elaborated below.

Parental expectations with regard to language skills cover the basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and communication, as well as the ability to pass examinations, learners' command of English vocabulary and their use of English. For example:

QPJ4	My expectation is about his(her) learning of daily communication, listening and reading comprehension. I hope (s)he can have better pronunciation.
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The expectation of gaining opportunities refers to children obtaining more chances in future job hunting and studying abroad:

QPJ5	I hope (s)he can go to study abroad.
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Syllabus-level satisfaction means that parents only expect their children to be confident with learning English at the level of the school syllabus:

QPJ18	Regarding his (her) current learning situation, I am happy as long as (s)he can master what the teacher has taught them.
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Focusing on the individual refers to parents' care about the emotional and learning interests of their children, rather than only looking at the gaining of language skills:

QPJ19	As long as she feels happy in learning, I do not require that my child must go abroad. I don't have such thoughts.
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'Blind' positivity means that parents have a positive but vague sense of expectation:

QPJ16	We hope that she can develop further and gain higher abilities.
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No requirement means that parents expressed no particular expectation towards their children's English language learning explicitly:

QPJ18	Let nature take its course.
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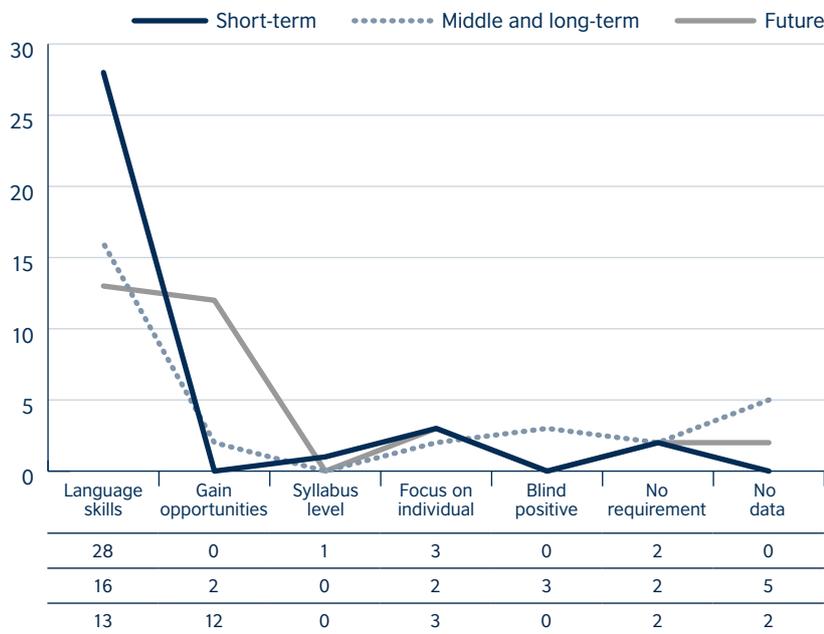
These six aspects of parental expectations are illustrated in figures 12–15, below, in relation to each school and whether the parents' expectations are short term, middle-to-long term or for the future (an even longer term).

4.3.2.2 Parental expectations in different schools

The interview data was further analysed by examining the content of parents' responses. A pattern of length of expectation with short-term, middle-to-long-term and future expectations was found, which varied from parents belonging to different schools (see figures 12–15).

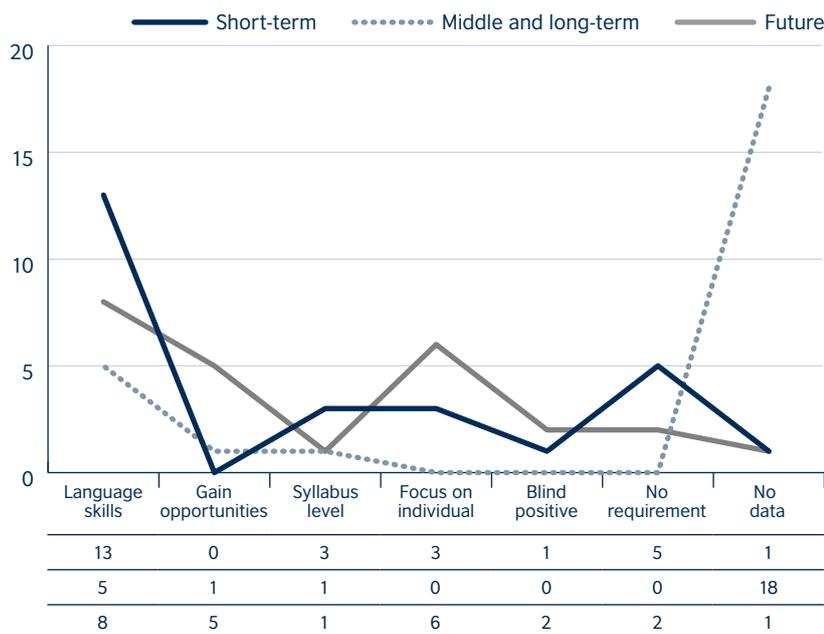
The QPJ parental expectations appear to focus mainly on children’s acquisition of language skills. This restricted focus may carry dangers (although this depends on the teaching approaches in the schools): if these parents overemphasise language skills with their children, this may result in greater pressure being put on children. Without a more holistic approach that takes children’s social, affective, psychological and cultural learning into consideration, this stress on language skills may not offer the support to develop the all-around competence and humanity of children through language learning.

Figure 12: Results of expectation types by QPJ parents



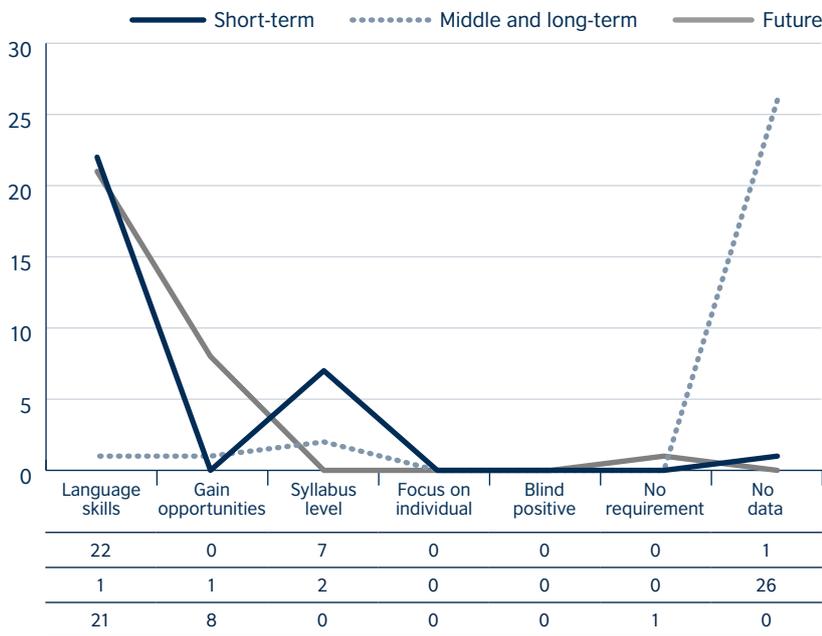
Similar to the parents of QPJ children, LJS parents also put their expectations on language skills, with the difference that their expectations about the future opportunities that English may bring (20 per cent) are lower than those of QPJ parents (38 per cent).

Figure 13: Results of expectation types by LJS parents



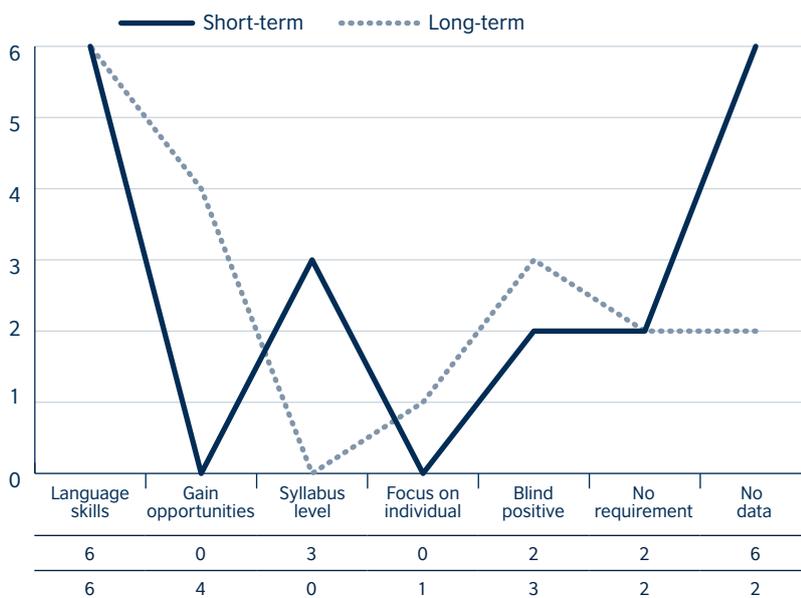
Parental expectations of English learning from WLL placed an emphasis on language skills in both the long-term and the short-term orientations. The second part of the short-term expectations is consistent with the school's education, while the long-term expectations are of the opportunities believed to accrue to children through learning English.

Figure 14: Results of expectation types by WLL parents



The results from parents in FJP show that although they also tend to put stress on language skills, they seem to treat English learning merely as a tool or practical ability. Meanwhile, a large number of parents hold blind positive attitudes towards their children's language learning: they are positive but in vague, indefinite or unspecified ways.

Figure 15: Results of expectation types by FJP parents



In sum, parents from all four schools have demanding expectations regarding their children's English language skills, although there are various nuances in expectations among the groups of parents from the four different schools regarding short- or long-term visions for their offspring. Perhaps surprisingly – given the young age of their children – these parents all tend to take a long-term view of their children's future opportunities, made possible by their command of English language, including considerations of jobs and careers, which reflects how parents' dreams, desires and visions for their children involve learning English. This helps to explain the hugely increased demand for English among young learners in China.

Table 3 gives a more detailed summary, using percentages, of parental expectations relating to the six aspects outlined previously.

Table 3 shows parental expectations to be divided into six aspects, with each aspect related to three time spans of expectations, namely short-term, middle-term and long-term expectations, as well as future expectations. Due to the absence of data, parents' middle- and long-term expectations in WLL and FJP primary schools are not presented here.

Even though six aspects of parental expectation are identified, this does not necessarily mean that each aspect is of equal importance. Expectation is a changeable mental status (Zhu, 1989), varying

from person to person and from time to time.

The information presented in Table 3 demonstrates that parents are more concerned about children's language skills and gaining opportunities. Their short-term expectations for children's language skills are higher than their future expectations (with FJP school parents an exception) and, contradictorily, they lay more emphasis on the practical usage of language as their children grow older.

Parental expectations about children's individual development are also worthy of note. Parents of WLL children appear not to pay attention to their children's self-development as much as parents in the two other primary schools. Differences in parents' social and economic backgrounds may explain this phenomenon: WLL parents come from families with professional jobs and higher education levels and some parents serve in military units (requiring professional and educational qualifications). Parents in these families may therefore make greater demands of their children and care more about their academic achievements. However, parents of LJS children are generally not highly educated (45 per cent of parents are migrant workers; 55 per cent of parents are nearby factory workers): they tend to 'let nature take its course' rather than intervene in their children's study. There is a similarity in their questionnaire responses. This explanation may also be viewed as a reason why LJS parents demonstrate fewer requirements for their children.

Table 3: Parental expectations of four primary schools from the six aspects

Vision time span	QPJ			LJS			WLL		FJP	
	short	middle and long	future	short	middle and long	future	short	future	short	future
Language skills	82%	53%	41%	50%	53%	32%	73%	70%	32%	33%
Gain opportunities	0%	6%	38%	0%	6%	20%	0%	27%	0%	22%
Syllabus level	3%	0%	0%	11%	0%	4%	23%	0%	16%	0%
Focusing on individual	9%	7%	9%	12%	7%	24%	0%	0%	0%	6%
Blind positive	0%	10%	0%	4%	10%	8%	0%	0%	10%	17%
No requirements	6%	7%	6%	19%	7%	8%	0%	3%	10%	11%
No data	0%	17%	6%	4%	17%	4%	4%	0%	32%	11%

5

Limitations and further research

This is an exploratory study with limitations and constraints on the time period for the research, the number and range of participating children and parents, the number of schools involved, and the ages of the children learning English. One significant drawback has been that inevitably we have compared Y1 and Y3 learners indirectly in separate year groups of different children, and so besides advocating further studies with larger samples, we recommend longitudinal studies in which the same children from Y1 are monitored and studied when they reach Y2, Y3 or Y4 (such studies might include out-of-school learning of English, which we have shown is important). It would be of interest if research were to involve parents and grandparents at these stages, to ascertain the development of attitudes, motivation and parental support (and perhaps their own English skills), which, through the window of English teaching, would be of significance for primary education in general, especially in China where grandparents are often the immediate caregivers for young children. In parallel, further studies using elicited metaphor analysis could be developed with older learners and, as a further interesting angle, with parents and teachers. We believe this research method can help to develop greater insights into participants' views, beliefs and understandings.

6

Conclusions

This study has achieved a number of objectives of the investigation into the motivations of primary school learners of English and the expectations of their parents. It has helped to fill a gap in the research on the motivations for learning English of this age group in China, employing both established and innovative research methods. Significantly, this study has explored parents' views. Parents of young learners are an important stakeholder group in China because they are one of the main supporters of English learning, driving the demand for ELT in primary schools and for out-of-school language activities in training institutes and private classes, and for education in general. The study helps to bridge the gap between English teachers and Early Years teachers in China, where the latter, through their training, generally have more developed knowledge and practices regarding the importance of home-school links and parental roles, while the former often have more developed interactive pedagogies from the materials, methods and practices deriving from the international field of English language teaching. The results of this study may imply ways in which both groups can learn from each other.

A valuable outcome is that this research has successfully employed elicited metaphor analysis with this age range of young learners (i.e. seven and nine-year-old students). This may be the first study of the youngest cohort of learners of English anywhere that has used elicited metaphor analysis. It has shown that, firstly, it is feasible and effective to find out young learners' views and gain insights into their experience of learning English by using this method; secondly, the findings from this method have provided in depth data that differs from the more conventional questionnaire and interview methods; and, thirdly, a significant outcome is that the metaphors and entailments from these young learners have revealed that they are able to think in a dynamic way to evaluate their learning experiences through the expressions of metaphors and entailments.

Both questionnaire and metaphor data findings have demonstrated that learners of these age groups are happy and positive towards English learning. They particularly enjoy learner-centred and interactive ways of learning, with praise from teachers and parents that forms a positive and enjoyable social-educational environment for

learning. These affective factors are crucial in motivating young learners, and facilitate and encourage their participation in learning English. This social motivation between learners is a kind of social network linking with self-efficacy that plays a role in creating positive motivational contexts (Dadi and Jin, 2013). This study shows how Y1 and Y3 children can have a high level of awareness of learning processes and some have complex attitudes and motivations. Cognitively, the data has indicated that the seven-year-old group of learners may have a relatively stronger belief that they learn English for passing the exams and understand that it is a curriculum requirement, while the nine-year-old group of learners tend to have a more dynamic understanding of English learning with a broader vision that embraces both the enjoyment and the possible difficulties in English learning, as well as a concern for passing the exams. Progress through their cognitive maturity would help sustain their motivation for their future English learning, but we have noted a few neutral and negative attitudes.

The questionnaire and interview data has fulfilled the objective of ascertaining the current expectations of parents with regard to their children's learning of English in these age groups. These parents come from all walks of life with different educational backgrounds. They resemble a large proportion of Chinese parents in this era. Six types of parental expectations have been identified and they have been further categorised into short, medium/long and future expectations.

The key findings show that these parents put a substantial amount of trust and faith in their children's schooling (teachers, learning and curriculum). They have also invested a good proportion of their annual income in supporting their children's English learning. Many parents focus their expectation on English language skills mainly as a key achievement indicator of their children's English learning. They envisage that English will be important for their children's future education and career (even at this young age) and therefore they expect to support their children's learning of English as an investment for their future. While many parents expect their children to achieve the required level of English at primary school, a number expressed a view that they would be

content with whatever outcome was obtained, as long as their children were happy with their learning of English. However, parents with a higher educational background tended to have higher expectations with regard to their children's learning outcomes. This may create a challenge to language policy makers and English teachers in primary schools, in relation to meeting the needs of different learners and differing expectations of parents.

More generally, the metaphor generation activity with this age group demonstrates an aspect of creativity, which, with problem solving, although relatively undeveloped in most schools, is increasingly emphasised by the authorities as important in Chinese education. Our data from these young children is originally in Chinese, but examples of the children's metaphors can be used with older learners – in English – to stimulate their discussion about learning English with the incentive to develop their own metaphors in English.

For teacher development, we have found it useful to share metaphors from students with groups of teachers to develop discussion and enhance their thinking about learning and English teaching activities based on varying orienting metaphors and different ranges of entailments. Similarly with parents, examples of contrasting metaphors could be used to develop discussion as part of home-school liaison activities, say as part of a school-organised 'English day', when parents might also generate their own metaphors, including metaphors to represent their conceptions of parental roles in children's learning. This would give teachers the opportunity, using some of our examples, to introduce further ideas and activities for parents besides informing parents of school practices in teaching English and other curricula areas.

This study has aimed to capture the thoughts, perceptions and comments made by Chinese primary school learners of English and their parents, on their motivations and expectations. It is hoped that this study has stimulated interest in looking further into these matters. More detailed studies are needed on motivations and expectations related to, for example, gender, parents' professions, learners' general curriculum subject attainments, teachers' views, the effectiveness of teaching methods, and communication with learners and parents. A longitudinal study is clearly needed, to follow the development of learners and monitor the changes in parents.

Hopefully the findings of this study will encourage more researchers and teachers to join the search and understand the motivations and attitudes of young learners in China and elsewhere. This will enhance the development of language learning policy, teaching methods and the educational environment, and stimulate investment in the happiness of children's learning through the improvement of their learning environment, gaining the further support of parents so as to provide a holistic and positive learning outcome for their English learning experience. As Early Years teachers say: 'The foundation starts here', and as English teachers say: 'This is a language for many aspects of your life.'

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