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# Exploring English Language Learning Experiences of Adult Chinese Immigrants

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Exploring English Language Learning Experiences of Adult Chinese Immigrants

by

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A THESIS

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## **Abstract**

Adult Chinese immigrants face many challenges in transition experiences when moving to Canada. Good English language proficiency is essential for integration into Canadian society as it determines educational and employment opportunities. Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs are government-funded programs that support immigrants in improving their English language levels and in understanding Canadian culture. The purpose of this research is to have an in-depth understanding of adult Chinese immigrants' transition experiences in Canada to help policymakers and instructors more effectively understand and support this demographic in their transition experiences. I employ a qualitative and descriptive single case study to explore and describe this aspect through the lens of the 4S System of transition theory, which consists of Self, Situation, Strategies, and Support. Employing semi-structured interviews, four participants were selected for the research through a purposeful sampling method. The gathered data was then analyzed through the lens of the 4S System, which incorporates the themes of transitions, inner strengths, strategies, and support. The research results found that participants' inner strengths, such as optimism, supported them in dealing with transitions. Research results also showed the importance of a strong support system, such as government, institutions, community, friends, and family in helping Chinese immigrants deal with transitions.

*Keywords:* LINC, Adult Chinese immigrants, transition theory, 4S System, adult learning and education

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## **Definition of Key Terms**

In this section, a list of key terms and their definitions pertaining to this study are included.

*Adults:* An adult is defined biologically as someone who is mature enough to reproduce, legally as someone who is aged 18 or older in Canada (Government of Canada, 2022), socially as someone who can perform adult roles, and psychologically as someone who can develop the self-concept of being responsible for their own lives and who is self-directed (Knowle, 1980).

*Challenges:* Challenges refer to experiences or situations that require individuals to confront new or complex tasks, ideas, or circumstances that may disrupt their existing knowledge or beliefs (Mezirow, 2003).

*Disjuncture:* Disjuncture refers to an individual's perception gap between the individual's inner self and outer world (Jarvis, 2006). To resolve disjuncture, one needs to develop new meanings, feelings, knowledge, skills, and so on to experiences; if an individual fails to deal with disjuncture, the individual will live with the disjuncture.

*Disorienting dilemmas:* Disorienting dilemma is a type of perception dilemma that results from encountering challenging experiences that do not match an individual's expectations or make sense to them; the individual has difficulty settling the predicament without shifting their worldview. (Mezirow et al., 2000).

*LINC:* LINC stands for Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada. It is a program offered by the Government of Canada that provides free language training for adult immigrants and refugees who are settling in Canada (Government of Canada, 2004; 2011).

*ESL:* ESL stands for English as a Second Language. It refers to the process of learning and using English as a non-native language in Canada where English is the dominant or official language (Government of Canada, 2021).

*Immigrants Vs Newcomers:* Immigrants are individuals “who [have] moved from their country of origin (their homeland) to another country, for example, Canada, to become [citizens] of that country” (Newyouth, 2019, para. 2). Newcomers are immigrants or refugees “who have been in Canada for a short time, usually less than five years” (Newyouth, 2019, para.1). Additionally, refugees are “people who came to Canada seeking safety and protection because they are escaping from persecution or other disasters in their homeland” (Newyouth, 2019, para. 3).

*Transition theory:* According to Anderson et al. (2012), the transition theory initially explains nursing therapies to assist clients in transition. It also describes the transition as an open system with three phases: endings, neutral zones, and beginnings, all of which can result in substantial life changes. Transitions are “any [events], or [non-events] that result in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 39).

*Visible minority:* Visible minority is a legal term that refers to those who are “non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour,” not including Indigenous people (Statistic Canada, 2017, para.1).

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

As a Chinese immigrant in Canada, I have faced challenges throughout my English language learning experiences, which have motivated me to investigate the learning experiences of other Chinese immigrants. Even though Canada has two official languages (English and French), English is the dominant one in most provinces. Most Chinese immigrants decide to take English training programs after moving to Canada since low English levels are detrimental to gaining education, employment, and other types of opportunities. Similarly, Larrotta (2019) states that “knowing English means being able to obtain a better-paying job, becoming self-sufficient, having access to services and culture, having a wider access to information and knowledge, developing a sense of belonging, and finding the courage to apply for citizenship” (p. 55).

Several studies have looked at younger Chinese immigrants’ English literacy learning (Guo, 2015; Jia et al., 2016) and English as Second Language (ESL) learning among Chinese immigrants who are more than 65 years old in America (Hsiao, 2014, 2016, 2018). However, few researchers have explored the perspectives and achieved a holistic understanding of the English learning experiences of adult Chinese immigrants (Larrotta & Adversario, 2020), which is the focus of this study. In particular, I explored the subjective realities of Chinese adult immigrants’ English language learning experiences through the lens of the 4S System of transition theory (Schlossberg, 2011; Anderson et al., 2012). In this study, I explored how adult Chinese immigrants make meaning from their English language learning experiences after participating in a three-and-a-half-month Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program in Calgary.

### **Overview**

In this chapter, I begin with background and contextual information, as well as present how I locate myself as a researcher. Following that, I talk about the research problem, the purpose of the study,

the significance of the study, and the research questions. Next, I discuss the transition theory as the theoretical framework for this research. Then, I go through the research design. Finally, I define and explain the key terms used in this study.

## **Background and Context**

In this section, I first present the background and then the context of this research. Canadian immigration policies and Chinese immigrants' positions in Canada are considered as the background information. Language training programs and diversity of Chinese English language learners are the context of this research.

### ***Background***

In this section, Canadian immigration policies and Chinese immigrants' positions in Canada are reviewed. Prior to the 1960s, it was difficult for Chinese people to immigrate to Canada, which is evident from examining the four phases of Canadian immigration policies. Historically, Canadian immigration policy was unambiguously racist when the government specifically barred non-White immigrants from entering the country (Taylor, 1991). According to Li (2003), during the four phases of immigration policies, non-white immigrants, such as those from Asia, were severely prohibited in Canada. Since 1960s, Canada has abolished ethno-racial or national barriers in immigration selection criteria by relying on considerations such as education, occupation, language abilities, and work experience (Guo, 2015). Therefore, more skilled and educated Chinese immigrants have moved to Canada due to these immigration policy changes. Since 2016, Chinese groups have been one of Canada's largest visible minority groups, with a population of more than 1 million people (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Despite this, Chinese immigrants are in disadvantaged positions in Canada. Immigrants are implicitly categorized in different hierarchies, which are determined by a combination of many

factors, including language, race, education level, financial status, ability, age, sexual orientation, gender, and country of origin. In 1899, Frontier College considered “good” citizens as “masculine, middle-class, Imperial Anglo-Canadian[s]” (Walter, 2003, p. 55). Later, Spencer and Lange (2014) concluded that “the dominant social construction of ‘Canadian citizen’ [is] White, male, middle-class, middle-aged, able-bodied, heterosexual, and Eurocentric” (p. 108). Immigrants who meet these requirements share an identity with the dominant group in Canada and are more likely to benefit from White privilege. According to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017), White privilege is about the advantages White individuals may passively enjoy due to their race; White supremacy is a belief system and ideology that actively promotes the dominance of White people over others. According to Sensoy and DiAngelo, White people are at the top of the social hierarchy and establish the standards by which visible minorities are judged, which allows White people to have more access to society’s resources and to profit from the benefits of inequality (p. 223). Mezirow et al. (2009) referred to *White supremacist consciousness*, which is the systemic belief that White people are superior to other races (p. 263). As visible minorities, Chinese immigrants do not have these White privileges since we meet fewer of these criteria of the dominant social construction of Canadian citizens.

Moreover, language is another detrimental factor influencing Chinese immigrants’ positions in Canada. According to Fitzpatrick (1919), “non-English speaking races are fertile soil for future trouble” (p. 2). The author, living in 1919, perceived the inability to communicate in English as a deficit. Guo (2009) proposed a *deficit model of difference*; these differences include the fact that these immigrants’ first language is not English, and therefore their educational credentials and previous work experiences are incompatible in Canada. Many people in dominant groups tend to view Chinese immigrants who speak English as a second or third language through the lens of the

deficit model of difference. To conclude, Chinese immigrants are in disadvantaged positions in Canada because of these systemic biases.

To change these disadvantaged positions, most Chinese immigrants choose to get involved in English language training programs in Canada. ESL and LINC programs are government-funded language training to support immigrants to improve their English or French for several purposes, such as integration into Canadian society (Government of Canada, 2021). Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2010) also suggest that “enrolment in further education and training” is a strategy for immigrant settlement (p. 3). Thus, learning English is one way for adult Chinese immigrants to change their disadvantaged positions in Canada.

### ***Context***

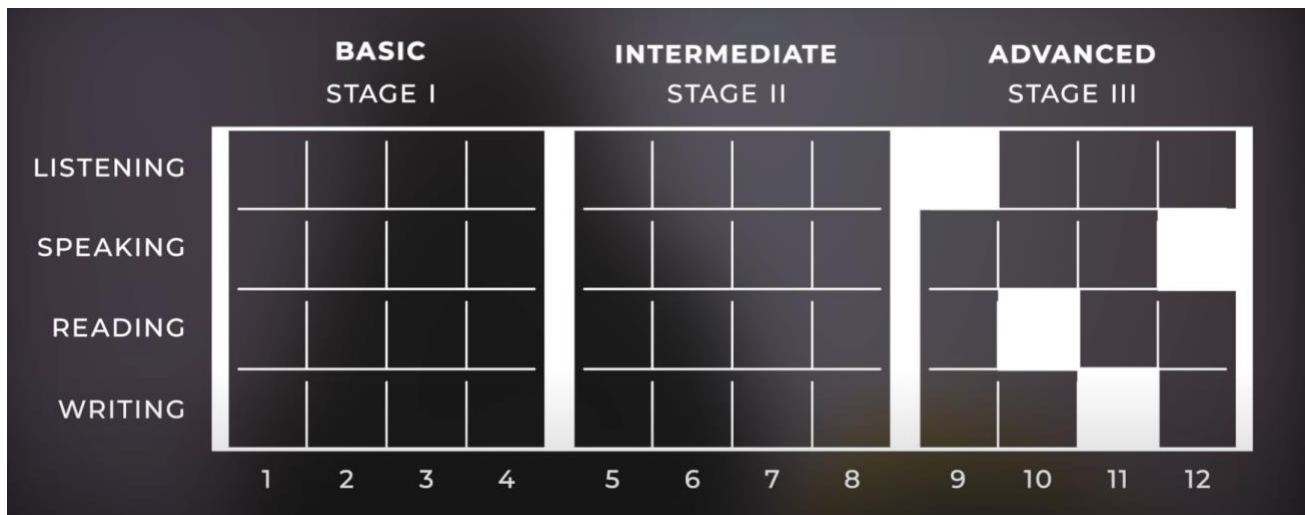
In Canada, English language training programs are provided to immigrants whose first language is not English. These programs, such as ESL and LINC, are often free of charge to immigrants. Moreover, Chinese immigrants are diverse. China has 56 ethnic groups, and Han is the dominant ethnic group. Understanding the context of Chinese immigrants can help stakeholders effectively support immigrants to deal with transitions so that immigrants can better integrate into Canadian society. In this section, I first analyze English language training programs offered in Canada, including ESL and LINC programs. Then, I present the context of adult Chinese immigrants.

**ESL and LINC Programs.** LINC and ESL programs are often government-funded language training programs. According to the Government of Canada (2021), LINC and ESL language training aim to enhance newcomers’ listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities to pursue and fulfil their educational and employment goals. LINC offers language training in English or French to help newcomers enhance their language abilities and to increase their understanding of Canadian multiculturalism and civics (Government of Canada, 2021). The Canadian Language Benchmarks

(CLB) are used to teach and evaluate students in English language training programs (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, n.d.) The Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing sections of the CLB are divided into three levels (i.e., basic, intermediate, and advanced), each with four levels of proficiency (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

*The Canadian Language Benchmarks*



(Note. Figure 1 is reprinted from Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, n.d.)

There are some main differences between LINC and ESL. First, the class structure of ESL can be provincially or federally funded or blended classes. In contrast, LINC is a classroom-based program consisting of four levels with a specialized curriculum and instruction. Second, LINC classes are accessible to Canadian permanent residents, convention refugees, and refugee claimants with a Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) Study Permit. When enrolling in LINC classes, students are required to take an assessment test to determine the appropriate level for placement. The ESL program aims to improve the English language proficiency of non-native English speakers, including Canadian citizens (Government of Canada, 2022). Another difference is that ESL programs provide more general instructions to students, while LINC programs have a more targeted instruction approach with a specific



Canadian context, including language instruction for the workplace, healthcare, and academic settings.

In Table 1, I display the differences mentioned here, as well as other differences between ESL and LINC programs.

Table 1

*Features of ESL and LINC*

<b>Feature</b>	<b>ESL</b>	<b>LINC</b>
Class structure	Can be provincially or federally funded or blended classes	Classroom-based program consisting of four levels with specialized curriculum and instruction
Eligibility	Eligibility requirements may vary based on factors such as immigration status or residency	Available to permanent residents who do not have Canadian citizenship yet, as well as convention refugees and protected persons
Level of Focus	More general language instruction	More targeted instruction with specific Canadian context, including language instruction for the workplace, health care, and academic settings.
Program Types	Adult English as a Second Language Program	Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada Program
Purpose	To help non-native English speakers improve their English language proficiency	To help newcomers learn English and integrate into Canadian society, with emphasis on Canadian culture, workplace communication, and everyday life situations.
Curriculum	Teaches basic to advanced English language skills	Emphasizes Canadian culture, workplace communication and everyday life situations.

(Note. Ideas in Table 1 is synthesized from Government of Canada, 2011, 2012, 2022)

Enrolment procedures and prerequisites for LINC or ESL classes can vary based on the institution or company offering the courses. To register for these classes, students must take a placement assessment test at an authorized language assessment centre (CCLCS, 2023; OCASI, 2020). “Canadian citizens are barred from LINC programs” (Guo, 2015, p. 31). According to the Canadian Center for

Language and Culture Studies (CCLCS, 2023), if students have previously taken a language assessment test at the centre, they can contact the centre directly to inquire about taking a LINC course. However, if a student has not attended LINC in over a year, they may need to retake the exam as a new student.

Additionally, in my original research proposal, I wrote that my potential participants and I were enrolled in ESL programs. However, after delving deeper into the differences between LINC and ESL, I noticed that I was enrolled in the LINC program. During the interviews, all my participants told me that they were enrolled in the LINC program as well. Therefore, in this paper, I have changed “ESL” to “LINC” when necessary.

Since all participants in this study came from the LINC program, it is necessary to provide additional details about the LINC benchmark. The LINC program offers up to eight levels of instruction, with level 1 being for low beginners and level 8 for high intermediates. Additionally, there is a pre-beginner level for literacy instruction for newcomers who score below benchmark levels on the Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment (CLBA). The CLBA assesses English language proficiency using the CLB framework (Government of Canada, 2004, 2011, n.d.).

Different provinces and regions may offer varying availability of LINC levels (Government of Canada, n.d.). In Canada, levels 1 to 5 are generally accessible in all provinces. However, levels 6 to 8 are only offered in some regions. For example, in some regions such as Calgary, LINC training is available for levels 2 through 8 (Calgary Immigrant Educational Society, 2023). Even though LINC programs are often classroom-based, online and blended learning options might also be available (Government of Canada, n.d.).

**Context of Adult Chinese Immigrants.** In this section, I discuss adult Chinese immigrants’ diverse ethnic backgrounds in relation to English language learning experiences. Larrotta and Adversario (2020) studied Chinese immigrants’ English language learning experiences in the United

States. The authors proposed that most Chinese people are Confucius learners and that those who follow Confucianism value education. While Confucianism may have a significant impact on most Chinese, it is important to note that China is diverse, with 56 ethnic groups (Zhou, 2003). Ethnic diversity plays a role in shaping adult Chinese immigrants' English language learning experiences. The Han ethnic group speaks Mandarin (Putonghua), but 55 minority groups speak up to 120 languages (Zhou, 2003). Most Han Chinese study English as a second language, while Chinese in minority groups acquire Mandarin as their second language. If Chinese in minority groups learn English, this becomes their third language (Lam, 2007).

Lastly, since China's reopening to the world in the late 1970s, English language instruction has received increased attention for its vital role in China's modernization and individual learners' access to new socioeconomic prospects (Wang & Gao, 2008). Thus, learning English is included in the curriculum from kindergarten to grade 12 in China, but the age at which children begin learning English varies by region and year. For example, participant Emily began learning English in Grade 3, Catherine in Grade 5, and Jam and Alicia in middle school.

In summary, China's diverse cultural and philosophical context affects language use and acquisition dynamics. While Confucianism may play a significant role in shaping Chinese culture and values, it is crucial to acknowledge the rich diversity within the country and consider how it impacts the English learning experiences of Chinese immigrants in different host countries. This recognition of diversity is vital in developing language training programs that better meet the needs of adult Chinese immigrants and help them integrate into the society of their host country, such as Canada.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I am a Chinese immigrant in my 30s who moved to Canada with my family in 2013. Because I come from the dominant Chinese ethnicity, Han, English is my second language. In Canada, though, I

am viewed as a visible minority. As a newcomer to Canada, I was in a disadvantaged position because employers did not recognize my educational credentials from China, I lacked Canadian work experience, and my English was not fluent enough for employment purposes. To try to remedy this situation, I accessed the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS), which offers credential assessment services for employment, work, and licensing (Government of Canada, 2022). However, while this service acknowledged my Bachelor of Laws degree and high school diploma from China, the credential I received from IQAS turned out not to be enough. Employers still felt that I lacked Canadian work and educational experiences. Moreover, my English was also not proficient enough for employment purposes, even though I started learning English in Grade 7 in China. I, therefore, enrolled in LINC programs in 2014.

After two years of study in LINC programs, my English Benchmark met the requirements for a Disability Studies diploma program. After receiving my diploma, I was offered a position as a substitute educational assistant at a public-school board. However, the hours I worked and the salary I earned were insufficient, so I decided to continue my studies and obtain an undergraduate degree in education. I have relied on student loans, awards, and scholarships to support myself and my family. Even before completing my bachelor's degree in education, I had more access to employment opportunities and educational opportunities. I was soon accepted into the Master of Arts in Adult Learning program. Shortly after that, a public-school board hired me as a substitute teacher. Now, I am a graduate student and certified teacher in Alberta, which has given me access to further opportunities. For example, I can apply as a Teaching Assistant for undergraduate and graduate courses.

I consider myself to be an insider vis-à-vis my research topic. However, even if I may have some shared experience with my participants, I have made every effort not to impose my assumptions upon them. This is especially important as I am cognizant that my role as a researcher gives me a certain

amount of power. My previous experience as a LINC learner and my identity as an adult Chinese immigrant might have influenced how I approach my study. Additionally, my experiences of studying and working in Canada might have brought me to be in more advantaged positions than my participants.

### **Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study**

Adult Chinese immigrants have faced challenges in their English language learning experiences, and there is a lack of research on this topic (Larrotta & Adversario, 2020). The purpose of this study is to explore and describe adult Chinese immigrants' transition experiences in LINC programs so that immigrants may develop tools to deal with transitions and so these teaching professionals can better understand this group of learners to support and teach them in more appropriate and effective ways. Schlossberg (2011) claimed that even the most desired transitions could cause traumatic feelings. Even though moving to Canada and learning English are both desired transitions for most immigrants, they can still cause upsetting feelings. I believe it is vital to explore these feelings as well as other subjective realities experienced by adult Chinese immigrants. I did so through the lens of the 4S System of transition theory.

### **Research Questions**

One overarching research question and four sub-questions guided this inquiry. During my research, the data showed that all participants experienced various transitions, including English language learning, employment, and psychological adjustments. Since English language learning was a type of transitions that participants experienced, I decided to change the term *learning transitions* in the research questions to *transitions*. Consequently, the focus of my research proposal was modified from “dealing with learning transitions” or “dealing with learning transitions and English learning” to simply “transitions” in this paper. Additionally, I found the strategies that adult Chinese immigrants employed to deal with transitions was missing. Therefore, sub-question 3 was added to address this issue.

Thus, the overarching research question that guided this study was, “What strategies and supports are utilized by adult Chinese immigrants when dealing with transitions in English language learning programs?” Sub-questions included the following:

1. What does the term transitions mean to participants?
2. What inner strengths and resources do participants draw from when dealing with transitions?
3. What strategies do participants use to deal with transitions?
4. What external supports and resources do participants identify when navigating these transitions?

### **Significance of Research**

The research findings may be of interest to Chinese immigrants and educational professionals who are teaching Chinese immigrants. Specifically, this research potentially benefits adult Chinese immigrants participating in English language training programs, as it can help them become more aware of their subjective realities and identify effective strategies and supports to deal with the challenges of transitioning to a new country. Other Chinese immigrants reading this study may feel relieved by realizing that they are not the only ones experiencing negative emotions, such as depression and anxiety, during this transition period.

Furthermore, educational professionals can benefit from the findings by gaining a deeper understanding of Chinese immigrants’ perceptions of English language learning. The research findings can inform the development of more effective teaching methods and curriculum design. Finally, the research findings also benefit English language training program management teams, including leadership, administration, and curriculum designers. The study provides insight into the subjective realities of Chinese immigrant students, allowing program managers to meet immigrants’ needs better and create policies that facilitate effective teaching.

Lastly, the significance of this research is that it has the potential to influence policy changes in the teaching of adult Chinese immigrants in Canada. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by this demographic, the research could inform the development of more effective teaching methods and facilitate a smoother transition for adult Chinese immigrants to Canada.

### **Theoretical Framework: Transition Theory**

Transition theory is the theory that guides the design of my study. According to Anderson et al. (2012), a transition can be defined as “any event or nonevent [*sic*] that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 39). Chinese immigration to Canada involves a geographical transfer and a significant adaptation to a new living environment, particularly in terms of culture and language use. However, because each person’s living situation is unique, how individuals define or describe transitions will differ. It is important to note that personal perception plays a vital role in transitions, as an event or non-event is only defined based on the individual’s own interpretation. For example, Chinese immigrants who receive enough support from their family members to cope with the anxiety of living in a new country will have a different experience compared to those who do not receive such support.

To capture participants’ unique experiences, I allowed them to describe their transitions using the 4S System of transition theory. This approach recognizes that transitions involve changes in the four domains: self, situation, support, and strategies. By examining these domains, I aim to understand the challenges and opportunities Chinese immigrants encounter during their transition to Canada. By considering individual perspectives and experiences, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of migration and the impact of transitions on the lives of adult Chinese immigrants.

## **Research Design**

I employed a qualitative case study (Merriam, 2009) as my methodological approach to answer the research questions. A case study is a bounded system, and bounded systems are those “in which the boundaries have a [common-sense] obviousness” (Marriam, 2009, p. 42). For my research, I limited my case study to exploring and describing participants’ learning experiences in government-funded intermediate English training programs over one semester; a semester is about four months. I used the purposeful sampling method to select four participants for my study. These selection criteria allowed me to provide in-depth and ‘thick’ (Merriam, 2009) descriptions of their English learning experiences.

## **Researcher Biases and Assumptions**

As a researcher, I know my positionality and am aware of my assumptions and biases in the research process. Here, I share some of these assumptions so that I am transparent in who I am and what I bring to the research. According to Freire (2018), being conscious of my lived experiences through praxis—reflection and action—is an effective way for me to have positive perspective changes. Consistently examining my assumptions and biases, I can be more transparent while conducting this research.

As a teacher who has taught in a variety of public schools, I observed LINC students struggling with their academics. Some LINC students expressed difficulty giving presentations in English in front of the entire class. It was difficult for them to overcome psychological obstacles to believe that they were competent in English. They typically stayed alone or with students who spoke the same language as them, so I assumed that it was difficult for them to make friends with native English speakers. However, I observed several native English speakers spending time with immigrant students and attempting to build positive relationships with them. My teaching experiences with LINC students, including talking with them and observations, may have impacted my assumptions as a teacher.



Next, being a previous LINC student, I assumed that the teaching pace in these LINC programs was relatively slow, with students only improving one Benchmark per semester. Another assumption was that the teaching content was easy, but the assessments were challenging. However, I preferred activities that allowed us to go outdoors for field trips, such as the park and zoo, which helped me become familiar with the city. Overall, I assumed that these LINC learning experiences were helpful but that they might be improved if the LINC planner could match the teaching content and the assessments at roughly the same level.

In conclusion, my worldview as a Chinese immigrant, my experiences as a substitute teacher, and my learning experiences as a LINC student, all contribute to some of the assumptions I have discussed here. My worldview helps me understand and interpret other Chinese immigrants' English language learning experiences in a more profound and contextualized way than non-Chinese researchers have been able to do thus far.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The study is delimited to focus on adult immigrants who came from China, who have been in Canada within the last five years, and whose English level is intermediate or above in English language training programs in Calgary. By delimiting the study to this specific group, the research can produce more accurate and meaningful results on the experiences and challenges faced by this demographic of Chinese immigrants in Canada.

Beside the selection criteria of these participants, there are a few limitations to this study. Firstly, my research is influenced by my subjective ontological and epistemological beliefs, which may cause biases throughout the process of doing research. My ontological belief is that there are multiple realities of nature. My epistemological belief is that knowledge is constructed through multiple subjective realities of participants. More details about my ontological and epistemological beliefs will be detailed

in Chapter Three. My worldview as a Chinese immigrant allows me to understand and interpret the learning experiences of other Chinese learners in a deeper and more contextualized way than a researcher who is not Chinese. In this regard, I see my subjective worldview as a strength when doing research with people from the same cultural background as mine.

Secondly, due to the limited sample size of this research, one limitation is that the research findings are not generalizable. According to Leavy (2007), researching a large population allows for generalizing research findings in a real-world context, typically in qualitative research. Since my research is qualitative and conducted with four participants from a specific demographic context, the findings can be transferable to similar research contexts. The findings can be transferrable to individuals with the same demographic characteristics as my participants. Moreover, the findings might also be transferrable to individuals participating in similar language learning programs or educational contexts, regardless of their demographic background.

The third limitation of this research is that all participants who reached out to me were females. Consequently, they cannot be representative of male adult Chinese immigrants, whose transition experiences could differ significantly from those of my participants. In addition, although English is the participants' second language and they have an intermediate or higher English proficiency level, they faced difficulties expressing certain words and articulating their thoughts fluently in English. To cope with this challenge, I utilized my proficiency in Mandarin to allow participants to communicate in their native language when they struggled to express themselves in English. This approach served as a mitigation strategy to prevent potential miscommunications. Furthermore, I employed member checks as another strategy to mitigate limitations. I reached out to all four participants, and two of them actively participated in member checks by reviewing the research findings with me.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I provided background information on Canadian immigration policies and the experiences of Chinese immigrants in disadvantaged positions in Canada. I also described ESL (English as a Second Language) and LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) programs in the context of my study. Furthermore, I discussed my positionality as a researcher and stated the purpose of the study, along with the problem statement and research questions. I highlighted the significance of the research, briefly introduced the transition theory as the theoretical framework, and provided an overview of the research design. After that, I outlined my assumptions as a researcher, discussed the limitations of the research, and provided definitions of relevant terms. In Chapter Two, I continue with a review of pertinent literature.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This qualitative descriptive single case study (Merriam, 2009) explores and describes the English-learning experiences of four adult Chinese immigrants in Calgary. I am interested in exploring their perceptions through the lens of the 4S System of the transition theory. To answer the research questions and to provide an in-depth description of the lived experiences of adult Chinese immigrants in LINC programs, this study is situated in Canada.

### Overview

In this chapter, I have identified four main themes in the literature review. The first theme is about previous studies on the topic of adult Chinese immigrants' English language learning. Second, because my research is in the field of Adult Learning, the big four adult learning theories—*andragogy*, *self-directed learning*, *experiential learning theory*, and *transformative learning theory*—are included. Third, the transition theory as a theoretical framework is explained to provide foundational knowledge of this theory, especially the 4S System. Lastly, the connection between the transformative learning theory and transition theory is included to bridge different literature between the fields of Adult Learning and Psychology.

### Previous Studies on Adult Chinese Immigrants' English Learning

In this section, I provide a brief landscape of studies that have been done on my research topic. Then, I examine where my research can be located among these studies. Lastly, I list some perspectives that I found from these studies. These perspectives provide factors that impact immigrants learning English.

***Landscape.*** Recent studies have focused on adult Chinese immigrants' English learning, with varying degrees of emphasis from different perspectives. Adamuti-Trache et al. (2018) investigated language acquisition challenges among adult immigrant women and explained their methods to enhance

language abilities within four years of arrival. In the same year, Drew and Mudzingwa (2018) explored students' perceptions of the Portfolio-Based Language Assessment model used in the government-funded LINC program. Ma (2019) examined several functions of L1 (first language) use in a beginner English class for 17 adult migrants in Australia by analyzing teacher-student and student-student classroom interactions. Wang and Christiansen (2019) explored the learning experiences of older Chinese immigrants who used free and popular English learning mobile apps like Duolingo/Hello English in the self-directed learning setting. Larrotta and Adversario (2020) described an adult Chinese immigrant group learning English at a cultural centre that serves the local Asian population. Chen et al. (2020) investigated the orthographic processing of English visual word identification in adult Chinese-speaking English learners using the multiple-route reading development model. Zhang (2022) did research on investigating Chinese skilled middle-class immigrants' language proficiency problems.

These studies have highlighted serious concerns about how to improve adult Chinese immigrants' English learning in the host country. Most significantly, they are all attempting to improve Chinese immigrants' English learning from various perspectives and in a variety of methods. Additionally, the English training programs have different names across these different studies, which might be different from the term LINC I used in my research. LINC was used in the studies of Drew and Mudzingwa (2018). For example, L2 was used in the studies of Wang and Christiansen (2019), Giveh et al. (2018), and Ma (2019). ESL was used in the studies of Larrotta and Adversario (2020) and Hsiao (2014, 2016). Lastly, the studies of Drew and Mudzingwa (2018) and Larrotta and Adversario (2020) specifically focused on learners' perceptions of English learning, which is where my study is located.

### ***Perspectives Extracted from Previous Studies***

English language proficiency in the host country affects immigrant social outcomes in the workplace and schools. The study of Jia et al. (2016) found that scores on tests of English language

proficiency and mainstream acculturation were positively and reciprocally related to each other for Chinese adolescents who were immigrants to Canada. The authors suggest that the effects of multiple demographic factors on the link between acculturation and reading proficiency should also be examined in future studies.

Later, Zhang's (2022) study has shown that Chinese immigrants, in general, have difficulty integrating into Canadian society, and language is one of the major reasons. For example, skilled Chinese immigrants frequently choose jobs that do not require strong communication skills due to their insufficient knowledge of English and other barriers. There are socio-cultural barriers in the workplace that prevent them from communicating with their Anglophone colleagues, and they face isolation and racial discrimination at work. These participants also expressed a reluctance to invest in English for a variety of reasons, including the belief that they could improve their English through work. However, many Chinese immigrants are enrolled in English training programs in Alberta, where my study participants are located. According to the Government of Canada (2021), China accounts for 20-30% of LINC students in Alberta. Lastly, the study of Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2010) suggested that immigrants need to be persistent and resilient to succeed in Canada.

Age, social status, and educational background play significant roles in adult Chinese immigrants' English learning. Wong's (2008) study showed that Chinese immigrant students who were over 20 had strong motivations to learn English. In comparison, the study of Hsiao (2016) showed that older adult Chinese immigrants had less incentive to learn English in America. Even though they enrolled in ESL learning, they might not keep studying English after naturalization. They might believe they did not need to speak English since they did not attend school or work and did not use English on a regular basis. Zhang's (2022) study found that middle-class Chinese immigrants are likely to invest in education to maintain their middle-class status. The study of Adamuti-Trache et al. (2018) also revealed

that “older women, less educated women, and some immigration class groups (i.e., spouse/dependents, family class, refugees) have lower language proficiency at arrival and fewer chances to improve” (p. 16). To summarize, it appears that adult Chinese immigrants aged 20-65, particularly those from the middle class and those who are well-educated, have higher incentives to invest in education.

Additionally, there are inconsistencies in defining older adult immigrants. In the study of Hsiao (2014, 2016, 2018), older adults are those whose age is more than 65; however, in the study of Wang and Christiansen (2019), the age of older adults is more than 45. Statistics Canada (2022) indicates that the age of senior (older) adults is more than 65.

**Summary.** Based on my exploration of recent studies, there is limited previous research on adult Chinese immigrants’ perceptions of English learning experiences. I noticed perspectives that uncovered more of my questions and new areas for further exploration. The perspectives that I noticed are mainly in two parts: (1) English language proficiency in the host country affects immigrant social outcomes; (2) age, social status, and educational background play significant roles in adult Chinese immigrants’ English learning. I noticed from a macro view that English learning is used for the purpose of supporting immigrants’ integration into Canadian society. After reviewing existing research on adult Chinese immigrants’ English learning, I discovered a scarcity of research on perceptions of their English learning experiences. My research on the learning experiences of adult Chinese immigrants has raised important questions and is seeking to enhance Chinese immigrants’ English learning in many ways.

### **Theories in Adult Learning**

My research topic is in the realm of education, and there are three main learning theories: behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism. Behaviourism is a learning theory that focuses on the observation of the environment and the reaction of the learner to it; all behaviour learned by a learner is through interactions with the environment (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Cognitivism suggests that learners

are thinking creatures that think about and examine their responses rather than just responding to environments and conditions. Both behaviourism and cognitivism use an objectivist lens to assume that the world exists and is external to the learners (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). The role of educators' instruction is to map out the external world for learners. Constructivism does not deny the existence of the real-external world but instead focuses more on the inner world of the learner. Constructivism holds that learners create meaning and interpretations of the world in which they are embedded (Duffy & Jonassen, 1991; Ertmer & Newby, 2013).

These three theories, namely constructivism, behaviourism, and cognitivism, are relevant to my research. My study aligns with the constructivist perspective, valuing participants' constructions of their experiences. However, my research primarily aims to understand and interpret participants' experiences, which is more aligned with interpretivism. Furthermore, behaviourism and cognitivism are important in examining external influences on participants, such as support from family members and instructors.

Since my research topic is specifically in the field of Adult Learning, it is necessary to include theories in Adult Learning. Four "big" adult learning theories (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014) can help educators improve their teaching practices while enhancing adult learning. These theories are andragogy, self-directed learning theory, experiential learning theory, and transformational learning theory. The goal of adult learning and education is to produce autonomous thinkers (Mezirow, 1997) and self-directed learners (Allan Tough 1967, 1971).

Andragogy is primarily concerned with the learners (Knowles, 1980), whereas self-directed learning theory is concerned with not only the learners but also the learning process and results (Tough 1967, 1971). The learners, the learning process, and the experiences created through interactions with the environment and others are central to experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984). Transformative learning theory focuses on the structure of assumptions that people have that influence their perceptions



to interpret the meaning of the world where they have experiences (Mezirow, 1997). In this section, the big four adult learning theories are included, along with essential concepts and critiques of each theory.

**Andragogy.** Alexander Kapp, a German school teacher, originated the word *andragogy* in 1833 (Mews, 2020). Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy established andragogy as an adult education theory in the 1920s; his work had a significant impact on other central people in the field, including Eduard Lindeman (Loeng, 2018). It was later popularized in the United States by American educator Malcolm Knowles from the 1960s to the 1980s. According to Knowles (1980), andragogy (Greek for “man-leading”) should be separated from the more common term pedagogy (Greek: “child-leading”). Knowles (1980) developed andragogy, which is “the art and science of helping adults learn” (p. 43), whereas pedagogy is teaching strategies that help children to learn. The two well-known contributions of Knowles’ work are four perspectives of defining adults and six key assumptions of the learners.

Knowles (1980) offered perspectives on what it means to be an adult. An adult is defined biologically as someone who is mature enough to reproduce, legally as someone who is aged 18 or older in Canada (Government of Canada, 2022), socially as someone who can perform adult roles, and psychologically as someone who can develop the self-concept of being responsible for their own lives and who is self-directed (Knowle, 1980).

Knowles’ andragogy framework that focused on the learners has evolved into six assumptions of adult learning (Knowles, 1980), which are included below:

1. The need to know: Adults need to know why they need to learn something before they invest in the endeavour.
2. The learners’ self-concept: Adults have a self-concept that assumes responsibility for their decisions and their own lives. As a result, it is critical to develop learning situations in which adults are viewed as being self-directed and responsible for their own learning.

3. The role of the learner's experience: Adults come into learning situations with an increasingly rich reservoir of experiences. As educators, it is important to recognize the pivotal role of those experiences in a learning situation.
4. Readiness to learn: The readiness to learn for adults is closely associated with real-life situations and experiences. For example, learning about hypothermia would be extremely timely and relevant for someone preparing for a backcountry canoe trip.
5. Orientation to learning: Adults are life-centred in their orientation to learning.
6. Motivation: The most crucial motivation for adults to learn comes from within (e.g., self-esteem, quality of life) and not from external pressures (e.g., a job promotion).

(Knowles, 1980, pp.57-63)

There are three main criticisms of Knowles' andragogy: it is not a theory; andragogical approaches cannot be applied to all teaching circumstances; and it does not discuss the external world effect in shaping learners' lives and positions of learning (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014; Hartree, 1984).

First, Hartree (1984) argued that andragogy is not a theory. Hartree claimed that andragogy was closer to a learning philosophy but not a theory on how adults learn because a full theory of adult learning would include three dimensions: how, what, and why adults learn. Since Knowles' andragogy focused on the six assumptions of the learner rather than the learning process, "these dimensions do not emerge clearly" (Hartree, 1984, p. 207). However, Abeni El (2020) argued that andragogy is a learning theory that "has attempted to overcome some of the negative aspects of pedagogy to the adult learner..." (p. 59).

Second, it was argued by many teachers that andragogical approaches do not function in all circumstances; Knowles (1990) addressed this concern in his book *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*. He responded that dependent adult learners learn differently than independent learners since the

former learns in a more pedagogical manner. In other words, not all adult learners are independent learners; some require additional instruction and incentives from others to learn. Thus, educators should be engaged in dialogical conversations with learners so that they can have a better understanding of their learners' learning preferences and styles.

Third, Groen and Kawalilak (2014) summarized criticisms from other scholars and proposed that "Knowles was almost totally focused on the individual learner, without recognizing the power of historical, economic, and cultural forces in shaping learners' lives and the positionality of learning" (p. 143). Since Knowles' andragogy focused on the learners, it was understandable that it did not address external forces that may have impacted the learner.

***Self-Directed Learning Theory.*** According to Loeng (2020), "the principle of self-direction can be dated long back to England in the 1800s, where terms such as self-help, self-improvement, and self-education were used" (pp. 1-2). More progression in self-directed learning occurred in the early 1960s. Houle (1961) claimed that "visible self-directed learning" (p. 2) is vital to adult learning in his book *The Inquiring Mind*, even though his purpose was not to influence the research and practice of self-directed learning. One important contribution of Houle's work to self-directed learning theory is that "individuals can learn alone, in groups, or in institutions" (Loeng, 2020, p. 2). Groen and Kawalilak (2014) also characterized self-directed learners as those who do not have to learn in isolation but also with others or/and in the community. Two of Houle's PhD grads, Allen Tough and Malcolm Knowles, are also linked to self-directed learning. Tough, influenced by Houle, was the first one to provide a complete description of self-directed learning.

Allan Tough (1967, 1971) developed the self-directed learning theory, which is related to Knowles' six assumptions that adults need to know why, what, and how to learn in order to be more self-motivated and directed to learn at their own pace. Adults make decisions about their learning while

also juggling multiple social roles that come with responsibilities (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). Self-directed learning offers adults options of flexibility and to be more self-motivated in learning. Self-directed learning has two dimensions: a process of learning and the end point of a product. For a process of learning, learners have control of how they will learn, and learners are willing to pursue opportunities to learn. For the end point of a product, learners have the ability to think and act independently and find the resources to continue their education (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014).

However, Kandiko Howson (2020) proposed that learning involves three dimensions: affective, behavioural, and cognitive. According to the author, “[affective] measures cover how students feel and approach their learning, through constructs including confidence, resilience, self-efficacy, mindset and satisfaction” (p. 147). In contrast, “Behavioural measures focus on student activities, such as work placements, research projects, and engagement with virtual learning environments” (p. 147). Cognitive measures cover ‘traditional’ measures of learning, “such as critical thinking, problem-solving and disciplinary-based cognitive gain” (p. 147). When evaluating how adults self-direct their learning, the two dimensions of self-directed learning as well as the three dimensions of learning should be considered.

Lastly, Groen and Kawalilak (2014) consolidated critiques of self-directed learning theory, which are included here. Self-directed learning critics are similar to andragogy critics in that they question if self-directed learning can only apply to adults and if adults can be naturally self-directed learners. Self-directed learning focuses on the learners rather than the external influences that shape their personalities and self-interpretation of the world in which they live.

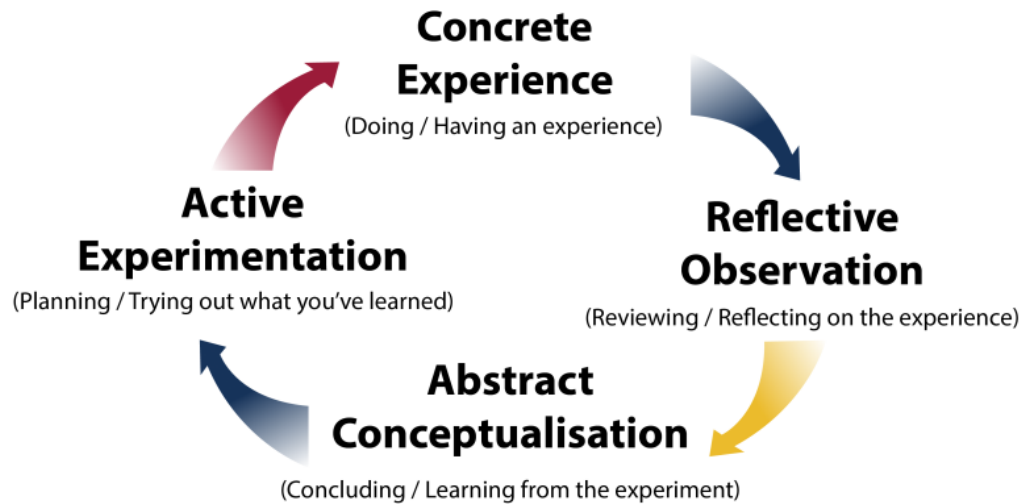
### ***Experiential Learning Theory***

Psychologist David Kolb was influenced by the work of other theorists, including John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget, and proposed the experiential learning theory (Kolb, 2014; Groen &

Kawalilak, 2014). Kolb (2014) defined experiential learning as the process whereby knowledge is developed or created through the transformation of experience. In other words, knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming the experience.

Figure 2

*Kolb's Learning Cycle*



(Note. Figure 2 is reprinted from Queen's University, 2022)

Compared to andragogy and self-directed learning theory, experiential learning theory takes a more holistic approach and emphasizes how experiences, including cognition, environmental factors, and emotions, influence the learning process (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). The graph of Kolb's experiential learning cycle (Queen's University, 2022) is presented above (see Figure 2). The graph depicts the linear process of how experiential learning works. It starts from concrete experience that provides information and serves as a basis for reflection. Then, abstract concepts are generated and formed by reflections of experiences. Next, abstract conceptualization forms conclusions to guide decision-making and planning-related actions. Lastly, Kolb's learning cycle shapes learners' habitual

consciousness of doing things, which impacts learners' learning preferences. Habitual consciousness is identified by Mezirow (1997) as *habits of mind*.

Criticisms of experiential learning are similar to critics of andragogy and self-directed learning theory in that the learning circle is too rational, autonomous, and linear (Smith, 2001). Other than that, external influences on learners' experiences are not included, and the learning model is more complex than the circle has demonstrated. External influences, such as educators' intervention, should be considered while employing experiential learning theory because the term "experiential learning" appears to be used in two different contexts (Brookfield, 1983; as cited in Smith, 2001). The first context is that educators employ experiential learning in educational settings to provide students with opportunities to gain and apply knowledge through tailored learning environments. Second, most experiential learning is "actually about learning from primarily experience, that is learning through sense experiences" (Jarvis, 1995, p. 75; as cited in Smith, 2001). Therefore, when employing Kolb's experiential learning circle, external forces that may have influenced learners' experiences must be considered.

### ***Transformative Learning Theory***

In the 1990s, Jack Mezirow developed transformative learning theory. Mezirow (1991) claimed that how learners interpret and reinterpret their lived experience is critical to producing meaning and, hence, learning. In this sense, transformative learning theory is used for individuals to consistently reflect on their frames of reference so that they can change dysfunctional ways of seeing the world and learn to be more inclusive and non-discriminatory. Frames of reference refer to the structure of assumptions through which individuals understand the world. Mezirow (1997) classified a frame of reference into two dimensions: habits of mind and a point of view, both of which impact people's

inclination to reject ideas that do not match their structure of assumptions. The distinction is that habits of mind are more challenging to be changed than a point of view.

Mezirow (1997) also asserted that an individual should not just reflect on his or her own structure of assumptions but also be reflective of the assumptions of others. This allows this individual to be better at problem-solving and decision-making by performing as expected and communicating effectively with others. Lastly, consistently reflecting on our assumptions might help us develop more inclusive and non-discriminatory values. These values are moral values, including truth, justice, and freedom, which are universally recognized (Mezirow, 1997).

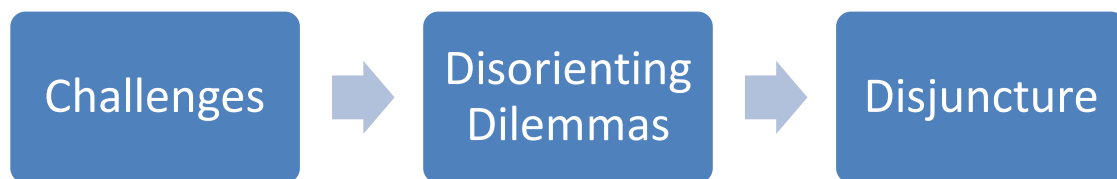
Next, I analyze the relationship among challenges, disorienting dilemmas, and disjuncture. In the context of dealing with transitions, my participants faced various challenges. According to Mezirow (2003), challenges refer to experiences or situations that require individuals to confront new or complex tasks, ideas, or circumstances that may disrupt their existing knowledge or beliefs. These challenges often provoke individuals to reflect critically and re-examine their assumptions, which can lead to transformative learning. Challenges can arise from various sources, such as academic studies, professional experiences, or personal encounters.

Mezirow and Associates (2000) refer to dysfunctional ways of seeing the world as disorienting dilemmas, while Jarvis (2006) alludes to disjuncture. A disorienting dilemma is a type of perception dilemma that results from encountering challenging experiences that do not match one's expectations or make sense; one has difficulty settling the predicament without shifting worldviews (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Disjuncture refers to a perception gap between an individual's inner self and outer world. To resolve disjuncture, the individual needs to develop new meaning, feelings, knowledge, skills, and so on to deal with challenging experiences; otherwise, the individual may fail to deal with disjuncture but rather choose to live with the disjuncture (Jarvis, 2006).

Challenges, disorienting dilemmas, and disjuncture are inherent aspects of life that arise when individuals' deep-seated beliefs, ideas, or skills do not align with their current situation. In this context, individuals need to find new ways to adapt and navigate the complexities they face. In Figure 3, it is shown that challenges can lead to disorienting dilemmas when challenging an individual's beliefs and assumptions. Disorienting dilemmas contribute to disjuncture by creating a perception gap between an individual's internal reality and the external world. Resolving disjuncture requires addressing and transforming one's beliefs and assumptions through critical reflection and acquiring new meanings, knowledge, and skills.

Figure 3

*Challenges, Disorienting Dilemmas, and Disjuncture*



In conclusion, Mezirow's transformative learning theory provides valuable insights into coping with challenges and disorienting dilemmas. This theory is instrumental in fostering individuals' ability to consistently reflect on their frames of reference so that they can become autonomous thinkers who can cultivate more inclusive values.

Finally, even though transformational learning theory suggests learning as having both individual and social dimensions (Cranton & Taylor, 2012), some critics argue that it presents an inadequate understanding of the social dimensions (Newman, 1994).



## ***Summary***

The big four adult learning theories provide guidance not only to help educators better map out the world for learners but also to help learners become autonomous and self-directed.

Adults learn differently than children because they are more self-directed and motivated learners; however, not all adults are independent learners. Some need extra support to develop skills and strategies to be independent learners.

The “big” four adult learning theories focus on one or more factors, including learners, the learning process, learning through interactions from experiences, and delving into learners’ inner world through consistent reflections of assumptions. The main criticisms of these theories are that they focus on the learner and/or the learning process without paying much attention to external influences, such as interactions with others and social dimensions. All these theorists hold a constructivist/interpretivist stance, emphasizing the learner’s perceptions in the learning process as they construct or interpret their lived experiences. The focus and philosophical foundations of these four adult learning theories align with my study goal, which is to explore participants’ subjective reality of their English learning experiences.

## **Transition Theory as a Theoretical Framework**

I have chosen transition theory as the theory to guide the design of my study. Individual perception is crucial in transitions because an event, or non-event, satisfies the criteria of a transition only if the individual experiencing it defines it as such (Anderson et al., 2012). According to Anderson et al. (2012), types of transition include anticipated, unanticipated, and non-events. Anticipated transitions are events that occur predictably, such as immigrants making plans to move to Canada. Unanticipated transitions are events that are not predictable or scheduled, such as divorce. Non-events are transitions that are expected but do not occur (Anderson et al., 2012). For example, due to

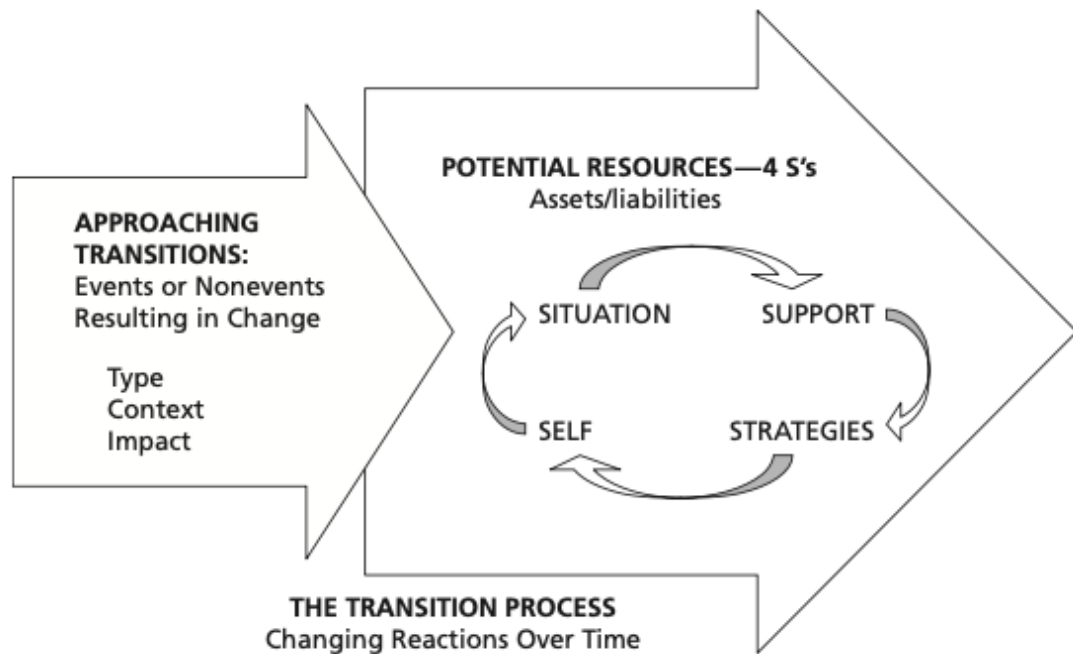
unforeseen reasons, immigrants fail to be admitted to LINC programs. This non-event, not being able to attend LINC programs, will also have a significant impact on immigrants' lives. Understanding these types of transitions helps me to explain transitions as a researcher but also how and what counts as transitions for each of the participants.

Additionally, context refers to one's relationship with the transition and to the setting in which the transition takes place. The impact is determined by the degree to which a transition alters one's daily life (Anderson et al., 2012). Since what counts as transitions are different from person to person, each participant will define and describe the transitions they have experienced.

Tools that can be used to influence individual adaptation to transitions have also evolved from time to time. Schlossberg (1981) proposed that there were mainly three factors that influence how an individual adapts to transitions. The first factor is "the characteristics of the transition itself, including role change (gain or loss), affect (positive or negative), duration (permanent, temporary, or uncertain), and stress level" (p. 15). The second factor is "the characteristics of the pre-and post- transition supports, and physical setting" (p. 15). The third factor is "the characteristics of the individual, including psychosocial competence, sex (and sex role-identification), age (and life stage), state of health, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, value orientation, and previous experiences with a transition of a similar nature" (p. 15).

Schlossberg (2011) and Anderson et al. (2012) added more factors that influence adaptations to transitions. The more profound factors that can be used to deal with transitions are the 4S System (Anderson et al., 2012). The graph of The Individual in Transition below depicts the process of an individual through a transition (see Figure 4). Next, I describe more details of the 4S System: situation, self, strategies, and support.

Figure 4

*The individual in Transitions*

(Note. Figure 4 is reprinted from Anderson et al., 2012, p. 39)

**Situation.** Larrotta and Adversario (2020) referred to the situation as an “assessment of the conditions and environment precipitating the transition” (p. 6). For example, if someone attends a LINC class while having family members care for their children and perform housework for them, coping with learning English becomes easier than if someone does not have the assistance of family members.

The situation is influenced by several factors/variables, including a trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience with a similar transition, current stress, and assessment (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 59). (a) A trigger refers to what precipitated the transition. (b) Timing relates to whether a transition is considered “on time” or “off time” based on one’s social clock. (c) Control refers to the components of the transition over which the individual believes they have control. (d) Role change refers to whether a role shift is involved and, if so, whether the change is considered a gain or a loss. (e)

Duration refers to whether the change is considered permanent, temporary, or unknown. (f) Previous experience with a comparable transition: how does previous similar experience affect the current transition? (g) Concurrent stress: are there any other causes of stress? (h) Assessment: who or what is responsible for the transition? (Anderson et al., 2012).

Larrotta and Adversario (2020) concluded that factors such as how, when, what, and where something happens, who participates, and previous experiences have an impact on the situations that affect transition. Connecting back to the research, when participants described their transition experiences in relation to these factors, what they have experienced, and each participant's definitions of transition became clear.

**Self.** Self refers to “the person's inner strength for coping with the situation” (Schlossberg, 2011, p.160). Psychological resources relate more to the inner self, which includes ego development, goals, commitment, and values. For example, someone's inner strength, such as resilience and stamina, have a positive influence on how someone deals with problems when learning English. However, there are external factors of self that can influence transitions since there are two types of factors deemed relevant regarding the self: (a) psychological resources, and (b) personal and demographic characteristics (Anderson et al., 2012). Personal and demographic characteristics affect how an individual views life and relates to the outer self, such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, stage of life, state of health, and ethnicity. For example, a person's educational background and age may also have an influence on that person's motivation to learn English. Finally, Larrotta and Adversario (2020) proposed individual physical, biological, mental, and emotional states as factors that influence transition.

**Support.** According to Anderson et al. (2012), “The types of support people receive are classified according to their sources: family relationships, a network of friends, institutions and communities where they work/attend” (p. 84). For example, adapting to a new life in Canada without

support from family, friends, or other resources might be challenging. Schlossberg (2011) proposed that “the support available at the time of transition is critical to one’s sense of well-being” (p. 160). In other words, if someone does not have much support in dealing with transitions, that person will probably feel too stressed, which will mostly likely impede positive transitions.

**Strategies.** Anderson et al. (2012) suggested that productive strategies used to cope with transitions “require abandoning old, tightly held images, letting go of the familiar, and transiting ourselves and the world around us” (p. 54). In other words, when coping with transitions, the individual must leave his or her intellectual and physical comfort zone in order to develop new frames of reference to interpret the world in which the person is embedded. For example, if old strategies for learning English no longer work, the person must look for new ways to improve English learning. Otherwise, the person will suffer from the consequence of not learning effectively. The direct consequence includes failing exams, while the prospective consequences include not being able to obtain work and greater educational options. However, whether a strategy is new or old depends on the situation and varies from person to person. Larrotta and Adversario (2020) described strategies as “ways in which individuals protect themselves from the consequences of transition” (p. 11), which serve the same purpose as strategies employed by individuals to develop a new structure of assumptions to deal with transitions.

Finally, Brandt (2003) argued about “the few strategies that are given to get through the neutral zone period” of transitions (p. 2). To compensate for this, it may be necessary to connect the ten phases of transformational learning theory with the three phases of transition theory. Doing so will allow individuals to develop strategies to better deal with transitions. Transformative learning theory, for example, proposed that continually reflecting on self-assumptions and being reflective on the assumptions of others might be employed as strategies for positive perspective changes. Reflecting on

self-assumptions during transitions might help individuals adapt coping tools used to deal with transitions more effectively.

**Summary.** Transition theory was employed as a theoretical framework for data collection and analysis. Since transition theory has evolved from time to time, I employed the definition and explanation of transition theory from Anderson et al. (2012). Even the most desirable anticipated transitions can cause unpleasant feelings and even trauma; therefore, it is necessary to develop tools to support people's transitions. The 4S System is the tool used to deal with transitions. This section included the details of the 4S System: self, situation, support, and strategies.

### **Connections between Transformative Learning Theory and Transition Theory**

Transitions are typically portrayed as events or non-events that change a person's relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles, which are also related to one's internal perspective changes. In this section, I explain the connections between transformative learning theory and transition theory. Transformative learning is developed in the educational field (Mezirow, 1997), whereas transition theory is developed in psychological field (Schlossberg, 2011). The connection between transformative learning theory and transition theory might bridge different thoughts between the fields of Adult Learning and Psychology.

### ***Ten Phases of Transformational Learning Theory***

Mezirow (2012) stated that transforming our frames of reference may need to go through the ten phases of the transformational learning process.

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. A self-examination with feelings of fear, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared

5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective

(Mezirow, 2012, p. 86; as cited in Groen & Kawalilak, 2014, pp. 154-155)

### ***Three Phases of Transition Theory***

The transition process can also be seen in three phases: endings, neutral zones, and beginnings (Bridge, 2004; as cited in Anderson et al., 2012). Bridge wrote that “endings are the first phase of transition. The second phase is a time of confusion before [‘life’] returns to some sense of normalcy, and the third phase is one of renewal” (p. 51; as cited in Anderson et al., 2012). For example, Chinese immigration to Canada means ending their daily lives in China in order to start a new life in Canada. Immigrants require time to adjust to their new living situations in Canada. Therefore, their lives may be less productive in the first year after arriving, which Schlossberg et al. (2012) refer to as the gap year. Attending ESL classes is a good start for immigrants to develop their education or career path in Canada, but this may come with the penalty of not earning a living.

### ***Connections***

The ten phases of the transformative learning process can fit into three phases of transition. For example, similar to the first stage of the transformative learning process, the ending phase of transition also includes disorientation. The second example is that when it comes to transitions, even the most desirable and expected transition can induce bad feelings or even trauma (Anderson et al., 2012), which is analogous to the second phase of the transformational learning process. There are many other

examples of how we might integrate the ten phases of the transformational learning process within the three phases of transitions. What the ten phases of transformative learning and the three phases of transitions have in common is that a person experiencing disorientation or disjunction will more likely go through the process of reflecting on self-assumptions, discovering answers, and possibly taking a series of actions to achieve internal harmony. However, not everyone must go through all ten phases of transformational learning described above.

The differences are that transformation learning theory focuses on internal perception changes, while transition theory focuses more on the 4S System of transitions. When experiencing transitions, a person goes through the process of perspective changes because the old ways of thinking and doing things will not help deal with new problems resulted from transitions. The 4S System serves as framework for analyzing these possible factors that can influence perspective changes during transitions.

Lastly, after transition experiences, the freshly reassembled self may undergo positive and negative perspective changes, which differ from person to person. Because what we think influences how we behave, what can be transitioned can be a product of our perspective transformations; also, because not all perspective transformations are positive, just as not all role changes in transitions are. Thus, it is vital to dive into participants' perceptions of how they perceive and deal with transitions. Continuously reflecting on self-assumptions and being conscious of others' assumptions can be additions to the 4S System while exploring participants' transition experiences.

**Summary.** The ten phases of the transformational learning process and the three phases of transitions have close connections in the process of transitions, which was analyzed in the last section of this chapter. Reflecting on self-assumptions can be additions to the 4S system to delve into participants' subjective realities. In Chapter Three, I provide a comprehensive overview of the research design, delving into its details in a systematic manner.

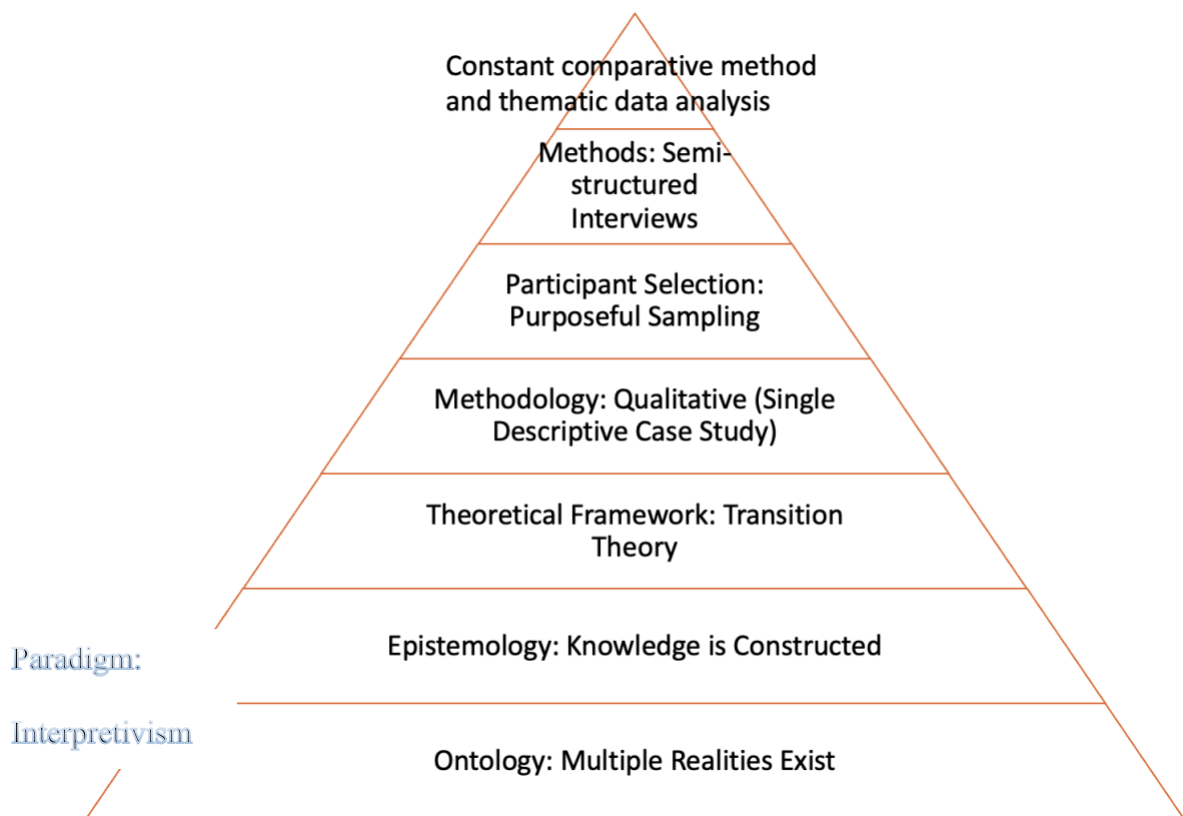


### Chapter Three: Research Design

My research design, which is illustrated in Figure 5, is depicted as a layered pyramid. Each layer represents a crucial element of the research process, reflecting the alignment of various research design elements. At the base layer, my ontological positioning informed my epistemological assumptions; from there, my theoretical concepts framed the research, methodology, participant selection, data collection methods, and data analysis, which all align with my research paradigm.

Figure 5

*Research Design*



#### Overview

In this chapter, I provide the philosophical underpinnings of using case study methodology to approach the research questions. First, I discuss my ontological and epistemological stance as a researcher. Second, this chapter includes a detailed description of the theoretical framework I chose to

inform the inquiry, followed by the methodology, the research participants, and the recruitment process. Further, I outline data collection methods, analysis, and ethical considerations. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a discussion on research trustworthiness, reflectivity, and reliability.

### **Ontology and Epistemology**

I adopted an interpretive stance to understand the phenomenon, recognizing that cultural and individual factors influence research and recognizing the researcher's positionality and the study's socio-cultural context. Interpretivism as a research paradigm is often associated with constructivism, which is closely linked to and sometimes used interchangeably with interpretivism, as defined by Merriam (2009). Leavy (2017) stated that the interpretive and constructive paradigm examines how people construct and reconstruct meanings through daily interactions.

In my research proposal, I adopted both interpretivist and constructivist stances because, at that time, I was confused about the differences between the two. After delving deeper into the differences, I decided to adopt an interpretivist stance to explore the experiences of adult Chinese immigrants. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), both interpretivism and constructivism share the same ontological belief that multiple realities exist, implying that reality is complex and multifaceted. However, they differ in their epistemological approaches. Constructivism acknowledges the subjective and contextual nature of reality, while interpretivism's epistemology focuses on interpreting and understanding human experiences and actions from multiple perspectives. Since this research aims to understand and interpret participants' lived experiences, employing interpretivism aligns with this goal.

Furthermore, my research paradigm is consistent with my research question as the research focuses on the understanding and interpretation of meaning through embedded and embodied learning experiences of participants, aligning with the philosophical perspective of interpretivism. According to (Leavy, 2017), a paradigm encompasses both epistemology and ontology. Epistemology refers to the

philosophical stance on how knowledge is constructed, and ontology refers to the philosophical stance about the nature of reality, as defined by Crotty (1998) and Leavy (2017). My epistemological belief is to interpret and understand human experiences and actions from multiple perspectives, while my ontological belief is that multiple realities exist in individuals' lived experiences. These beliefs align with my research question, which aims to understand multiple subjective realities in participants' lived experiences.

This research used case study as a methodological approach. Three well-known scholars—Yin, Merriam, and Stake—have contributed to the case study research design. My philosophical underpinnings of the case study align with Merriam (2009) and Stake (2008). Brown (2008) commented that Yin, Stake, and Merriam all belong to the 'constructivist' realm, with Yin closest to the positivist side and with Merriam and Stake closer to the interpretivist side. Researchers whose worldview is positivist "adopt a position of neutrality, which means they table their personal biases and feelings" (Leavy, 2017, p. 38), which is opposite to my worldview.

My interpretive perspective aligns with Merriam (2009) in that multiple and context-bounded realities are valued. Moreover, my paradigm also aligns with Stake's (2008) philosophical perspective. Brown (2008) commented that Stake's constructivist position emphasizes the researcher's role as an interpreter in providing "integrated interpretations of situations and contexts" (p. 7). Since I perceive myself as an insider of the phenomenon under study, adopting Merriam's philosophical perspective allows me to explore multiple realities with participants; employing Stake's constructivist position allows me to work as both a researcher and an interpreter.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In alignment with the research questions that initiated this study, I used the lens of the 4S System of transition theory to explore participants' perceptions of their English learning experiences. The 4S

System of transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012) serves as a theoretical framework to discover participants' subjective realities so that not only can participants be conscious of their learning, but also educators and policymakers can better determine how to support these learners. When dealing with transitions, participants have faced disorienting dilemmas or disjuncture. It is necessary to explore their perceptions of what their transitions are, what support they have received, and what strategies they have used. It is my intention to explore each participants' unique experiences of coping with transitions.

## **Methodology**

I employed a qualitative research design to explore the English learning experiences of adult Chinese immigrants in a LINC program in Calgary. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2018), a qualitative research approach addresses the question of “what” and “how,” and it is best suited to develop a comprehensive knowledge of a social situation or activity as seen through the eyes of participants. First, I employed a descriptive qualitative study within an interpretive single case study (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), descriptive is one of the characteristics of qualitative interpretative research, which can enable an in-depth and ‘thick’ description of the phenomenon.

Merriam’s descriptive qualitative case study design matches my research question so that I can explore and provide a ‘thick’ description of the experiences of the participants. Therefore, my potential methodological approach aligns more with Merriam’s (2009) descriptive qualitative single case study. Second, a case study is a bounded system, and bounded systems are those “in which the boundaries have a [common-sense] obviousness” (Merriam, 2009, p. 42). For my research, I limited my case study to exploring and describing participants’ learning experiences in the LINC program over one semester; a semester is about four months. I selected participants based on specific criteria. They were adult Chinese immigrants whose English level was intermediate or above and who had been in Canada for less than five years.

## **Participants**

I used the purposeful sampling method to find four participants for my study (Merriam, 2009). I decided to interview four participants based on the assertion of Merriam (2009) that although researchers cannot determine the exact number of participants who enrol, they must have some ideas. I believed that interviewing four participants would provide sufficient data to explore the strategies they have used and supports they have received in their 3.5 months of English language training program in Canada.

These participants were adult Chinese immigrants attending LINC programs for a semester in Calgary. I looked for participants whose English level was intermediate or above and who had been in Canada for less than five years. Purposeful sampling involves choosing participants who best reflect the purpose of the study and can provide specific, information-rich data (Merriam, 2009). The process of looking for participants includes at least the three phases listed below: (1) I received ethical approval before looking for participants. (2) I looked for suitable participants at language training institutions, such as the University of Calgary, the Centre for Newcomers, and Columbia College. (3) I distributed consent forms (see Appendix B) to participants and obtained their consent before collecting data.

### ***Participant Information***

In Table 2, I present participant information. The four participants who were recruited for this study are adult Chinese immigrants whose English language level is intermediate or above (CLB benchmark 6-8) and who have been in Canada for less than five years.

All four participants who reached out to me voluntarily were women, even though I intended to recruit both females and males. The four participants were between 33 and 43 years old. In terms of higher education, two of them had a bachelor's degree and the other two had a master's degree, all obtained in China. Each participant had previously held a professional position in China, ranging from

three to over ten years. Two participants began learning English in elementary school in China, while the other three participants began learning it in middle school. Three participants took the College English Test-6 (CET-6) at a Chinese university, while Alicia did not. Since Alicia's Spanish instructor advised her not to study English while learning Spanish, she did not learn English or take any English tests at universities in China.

Table 2

*Participants' Information*

Participant	Age	Gender	Length of stay in Canada (yr.)	Mother Language	LINC Class Level	Education	English Test in China
Jam	43	F	More than four less than five years	Mandarin	7	Bachelor of Law	CET 6
Alicia	42	F	Almost four years	Mandarin	8	Bachelor of Spanish Language	No
Emily	33	F	About seven months	Mandarin	6	Bachelor & Master of Computer Science	CET 6
Catherine	42	F	Three years	Mandarin & Cantonese	8	Bachelor & Master of Business Administration. Bachelor of English Language	CET6, IELTS, and Professional English test level 8

Additionally, prior to our interviews, I had never met any of the participants; they were all strangers to me. As a result, anonymity and a perceived power imbalance were not a concern. However, I was aware that I might have a position of authority over them as a researcher during our interviews. I

created a non-judgemental and comfortable interviewing environment to allow participants to share their thoughts openly.

### ***Sample selection and recruitment***

I used a two-step approach to recruit targeted participants. Firstly, I utilized purposeful sampling to locate potential participants within various English languages training institutions in Calgary, such as the Centre for Newcomers and Columbia College. Secondly, I employed random sampling to select participants from these institutions. The participant recruitment process involved the following four steps:

1. I applied for and received ethical approval before looking for participants.
2. As previously mentioned, the participant selection criteria were delimited to adult Chinese immigrants whose English level was intermediate or above and who had lived in Canada for less than five years. I emailed and phoned five English language training institutions to obtain their permission to recruit participants who met these criteria. Three institutions then gave me permission to recruit participants. In the email to these institutions, I highlighted the participant recruitment criteria and requested their permission to disseminate my recruitment poster (Appendix A). On the poster, I outlined the purpose of the research, what participants would do for the research, and explained that participation was voluntary and confidential. My supervisor and my contact information were provided so that the participants could reach out to me or contact me if they had questions or concerns about the inquiry.
3. After participants reached out to me, I emailed them the consent form (Appendix B) and scheduled a specific meeting time with each of them. Even though I offered the participants the choice to do the interview online or in person, they all chose to do it online. This was most likely

because the interview meetings took place during wintertime and during the COVID global pandemic.

4. Once I received the scan of the signed consent form from participants, I scheduled an interview date and time. We used Zoom meeting for the interview meetings.

## Methods

In this section, I explain the rationale for using semi-structured interviews as a method to collect data. Using a case study as a methodological approach allows me to collect information from participants that are not lost due to time constraints. Because a case study “affords significant interaction with research participants” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018, p. 110), I conducted semi-structured interviews as a data collection method. Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) proposed triangulating data acquired using several data collection methods. However, I am taking an interpretivist stance so that I do not have to discover *one reality* that is formed by several data collection methods.

Communication through interviews is dependent on the “I-Thou” relationship (Schutz, 1967; as cited in Seidman, 2013) because both I and Thou are alive and conscious human beings. Since the relationship between the researcher and participants can be changed in a short period (Seidman, 2013), *Intellectual humility* (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 20) is required. Intellectual humility is not about whether I agree or disagree, but, more importantly, it is about whether I understand others’ points of view or not. Furthermore, Seidman (2013) believed that the “we” relationship is too intertwined in that individual’s worldview as influenced by the collective. As a result, during the interviews, I maximized opportunities for participants to share their experiences. I was aware of participants’ subjective realities, as well as how their worldviews may have been shaped by the collective in which they were embedded.



Furthermore, Seidman (2013) proposed doing a three-interview series: (1) learning about the participants' backgrounds; (2) asking participants to reconstruct the specifics of their experiences within the context in which they occurred; (3) prompting participants to reflect on the significance of their experience. I included all these three aspects in one interview. The interview offered participants opportunities to share their background information, such as demographics, as well as other specifics of their English language learning transition experiences. I did not conduct a second interview with the participants since I had received sufficient data in one interview with each participant. The interviews were audio-recorded, and each interview lasted 30 to 50 minutes.

The purpose of conducting interviews is to engage in in-depth conversations related to the motivations for the participants to engage in LINC programs in Canada. The organizational construct I used to formulate the interview questions is purposefully linked to the study's research questions and the 4S System of transition theory.

Lastly, as noted by Merriam (2009), the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data in qualitative research, including case studies. This approach afforded ample opportunity for acute responses as well as a collection of meaningful information. In conclusion, as the primary research instrument, I used semi-structured interviews as the data collection method for my study.

### **Data Analysis**

In this section, I talk about the data analysis method and steps. The four participants were interviewed through semi-structured interviews. To ensure a comprehensive and trustworthy analysis, I followed Seidman's (2013) recommendations on combining data collection with analysis. Since my analysis was both inductive and deductive, I approached the data with an open mind, taking into consideration what participants thought was significant and meaningful to them (inductive), and employed the 4S System of transition theory to code the data (deductive).

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), data analysis tends to be objective, whereas interpretation tends to be subjective. To address this potential bias, I was reflective and attentive while interviewing participants and listened to their experiences. During data analysis, I intended to be objective even though there is no such thing as a completely neutral or objective researcher. Additionally, I maintained a reflective journal, which allowed me to clarify and be transparent about my thoughts and ideas. Writing down my thoughts after each interview helped me to process my own experiences and biases, which could have affected my analysis.

### ***Data Analysis Methods***

I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008) to analyze the qualitative data. Merriam (2009) also recommended thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in qualitative data. I followed these steps to analyze the data: identifying patterns, systematically coding, deriving themes, and creating a narrative. The thematic analysis involved searching across the entire data set and constantly moving back and forth between the data set to look for patterns and themes. This approach ensured that I captured the complexity and richness of the participants' experiences (Merriam, 2009).

For this descriptive single case study, I also used the constant comparative method (Merriam, 2009) in combination with thematic analysis. The constant comparative method is a process developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and used in grounded theory, where raw data excerpts are sorted and organized into groups based on attributes. These groups are then structured to formulate a new theory. This constant comparative method is suitable for this qualitative research's inductive, concept-building approach since I do not aim to build a substantive theory. I used this method to compare data sets from four participants, which led to tentative categories that are further compared with one another until a conclusion can be drawn (Merriam, 2009).

### *Data Analysis Steps*

My data analysis consisted of six steps by employing thematic analysis and the constant comparative method (see Table 3). Firstly, all interviews were audio recorded, and the content of the recordings was transcribed into texts. I identified the research questions and reviewed each set of data to make preliminary notes, comments, tentative themes, and ideas. Secondly, I coded the data collected from each participant, identifying patterns, themes, and categories that emerged from the data. After manually organizing the data, I used NVivo® 12 software to categorize further and organize the data. The codes for each data segment reflected the 4S System of transition theory that guided the inquiry. These two levels of analysis align with the coding method identified by Merriam (2009), involving initial and focused coding.

The third level of analysis involved constructing categories that shared similarities or identified differences with the patterns that emerged from the previous two levels of data analysis. According to Merriam (2009), categories should be conceptually consistent, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitizing, and in alignment with the purpose of the research; each category should clearly define the data it encompasses. I interpreted the data by drawing conclusions based on the patterns and themes identified, considering how each participant's data contributed to the research questions' overall understanding. I also employed the constant comparative method to analyze data from four participants. Fourthly, the themes were then checked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. Fifthly, ongoing analysis was implemented to refine the details of each theme and to develop names for each theme, creating coherent and meaningful stories from the analysis. Finally, inferences were drawn from the categories to develop a conceptual overview or theme that linked conceptual elements meaningfully, resulting in a scholarly analysis report (Merriam, 2009).

Table 3

*Phases of Thematic Analysis*

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Description of the Phrases</b>
1. Initial coding: Familiarizing with the data	Transcribing data, reading, and noting down initial ideas.
2. Focused coding: Generating initial codes and searching for themes.	Applying the 4S System of transition theory: Manual categorization and using NVivo® 12 Software to organize patterns, themes, and categories in data.
3. Constructing Categories	Interpreting data by drawing conclusions based on the patterns and themes identified.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the details of each theme, generating clear names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	Drawing inferences from the categories to develop a conceptual overview or theme, linking conceptual elements in meaningful ways, and producing a scholarly analysis report.

(Note. Table 3 demonstrates synthesized ideas adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2008; Merriam, 2009)

**Research Rigor**

Research rigor refers to the overall quality and soundness of the research. As for my research rigor, I ensured that the methods used were robust, the collected data were authentic and reliable, and the research results were credible and trustworthy. According to Merriam (2009), there are several strategies that researchers can employ to enhance research rigor in qualitative research studies. These strategies include practicing reflexivity, ensuring trustworthiness in the research process, and maintaining the reliability of the findings.

### ***Reflexivity***

Reflexivity is defined as performing reflective work with research participants rather than just about them (Gildersleeve, 2010); this reflective process means that no insider-outsider viewpoint exists. Specifically, once research began, I took notes to keep track of my personal ideas and questions. This form of expression helped me write more freely since it allowed me to reflect on new ideas, evaluate my thinking, and construct my ideas. Taking reflective researcher notes contributed to the depth of my intellectual processes and experiences. Lastly, I engaged more in reflective thinking and discussions by taking continuous researcher's reflective journals.

### ***Trustworthiness***

Issues of validity in “qualitative studies should be linked not to ‘truth’ or ‘value,’ as they are for positivists, but rather to ‘trustworthiness,’ which becomes a matter of persuasion whereby the scientist is viewed as having made those practices visible, and therefore, auditable” (Rolfe, 2004, p. 305). Interpretivists and constructivists believe that multiple realities exist; hence qualitative researchers are not aiming for one truth. However, even though I take an interpretivist stance, I must ensure that the data collected reflects participants' thoughts that they wish to express rather than ideas that I have guided them to follow. Another word for trustworthiness is *authenticity*. According to Neuman (2006), authenticity “means giving a fair, honest, and balanced account of social life from the viewpoint of someone who lives it every day” (p. 197). As previously stated, I am taking an interpretivist approach; I do not have to employ multiple methods to collect data to prove one truth. However, I used several methods to ensure that the data I gathered from semi-structured interviews is authentic. These approaches include member checking, participant checking data, and peer evaluation.

**Member Checks.** Member checking, also known as participant checking, is a common practice in qualitative research involving obtaining feedback or confirmation from participants regarding the

accuracy and interpretation of research findings, as Merriam (2009) recommended. In my study, I conducted follow-up interviews as a means of both member and participant checking to ensure the trustworthiness and reliability of the findings. I contacted all four participants to conduct participant member checking; two of them were able to make time to review the key findings with me. During my second member checking meeting with each participant, each of them informed me that they had already left the LINC program.

**Peer examination.** As part of the research process, I engaged in ongoing dialogues with my supervisor to conduct peer examinations and pool our understandings of emergent findings, as Merriam (2009) recommended. Additionally, I sought perspectives from personal, professional, and academic sources while maintaining strict confidentiality of the participants' information.

### ***Reliability***

The concept of reliability in qualitative research pertains to the consistency of findings with the data collection process (Merriam, 2009). In my study, I collected data from four participants via Zoom meetings, and each participant's responses were consistent. In other words, I did not notice any participants presenting any contradictory ideas during the interviews. Even if there might have been variations in the data collected during the same interview, it was still considered authentic. As Wiklund-Gustin (2010) suggests, narrative truth is often used in qualitative research to make sense of experiences as truthful fiction rather than practical truth. Through narration, participants construct or reconstruct their own versions of truthful fiction. Therefore, it is common to encounter contradictory ideas in individual narrations, but such discrepancies did not affect the reliability of my research.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Since the research involves human participants, I received ethical approval from the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) before collecting data. Then, I obtained consent from participants who voluntarily signed the consent form (Government of Canada, 2020). According to Leavy (2017), “ethics involve morality, integrity, fairness, and truthfulness” (p. 24). The consent form included the purpose of the study, what participants are asked to do, and at least two other items to achieve these ethical goals: the benefits and risks of participating in the study and policies for withdrawing from the research. Since the purpose of the study and what the participants were asked to do were stated earlier in this paper, I focused on two other items.

First, I informed participants about the benefits and possible risks of participating in this research project and the ways in which we might work together to mitigate those risks. One of the benefits is that participants could receive access to the data collected from them and the completed dissertation. One way to reduce risks is to keep participants’ names anonymous.

Second, I informed participants of the policies regarding withdrawal from the research. According to the Government of Canada (2020), “consent can be withdrawn at any time”; “if a participant withdraws consent, the participant can also request the withdrawal of their data or human biological materials” (A. General Principles section). My withdrawal policy followed these two principles. More importantly, participants can request to have their data removed up to the time of data analysis (two weeks after data collection). After this time, withdrawal is no longer possible as information from participants will be interrelated, so it may be impossible to separate it from what others say. If they do decide to withdraw before this point, their information will be destroyed. However, no participants requested to withdraw data.

Finally, the interviews with the participants were recorded using audio recordings. The semi-structured interview questions can be found in Appendix C. All the data collected during the study were encrypted and securely stored, with passwords for electronic copies and the researcher's written notes in a locked filing cabinet. I will retain electronic and hard copy data for five years in compliance with the record retention policy of the University of Calgary. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to protect their privacy, and their identities were not disclosed.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I talked about my study design. I began by discussing my philosophical underpinnings, including ontological and epistemological beliefs. I believe that multiple realities exist, and that knowledge is constructed in multiple ways. As a result, I chose to conduct a qualitative descriptive single case study (Merriam, 2009) to explore Chinese immigrants' English learning experiences through the lens of the 4S System of transition theory. Semi-structured interview(s) was used to collect data, and purposeful sampling was used to select four participants from a language training institution in Calgary.

Because I take an interpretivist stance, data trustworthiness does not require various methods of data collection. However, I employ a variety of methods, including participant data checking and peer examination, to ensure the authenticity of the data collected. Even if participants shared their experiences inconsistently in the interview(s), the data collected would be trustworthy since participants share their 'truthful fictions'. Finally, ethical considerations such as informing participants about the benefits and risks of participating in the research, withdrawal policies, and strategies for creating good connections with participants are discussed. In Chapter Four, I present the research findings.



## **Chapter Four: Findings**

I paraphrased ideas from four participants to present findings. I also included direct quotes from the participants to convey the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation while maintaining their voices. Since English was not the participants' first language, some errors in language conventions appear in the direct quotes. Modifications were only made when necessary to improve clarity and convey the intended meaning of the quote. Some repeated words in direct quotes were deleted to enhance readability.

It is important to note that minimal data was collected from one participant (Emily), who had immigrated to Canada less than one year before the interview timeframe. However, she shared valuable insights into the research questions from the perspective of someone living in Canada for less than a year. In addition, differences in talkativeness levels were observed among participants, which may be linked to their fields of study. Specifically, Emily, who majored in computer science, was less talkative than the other three participants who majored in fields requiring more communication with others.

### **Overview**

In this chapter, I provide a description of a case study that focuses on adult Chinese immigrants participating in the LINC program. I begin with a description of the different LINC program levels that participants were enrolled in at the time of the interview. Secondly, I provide a description of each participant in terms of categorization under the 4S System of transition theory (i.e., Situation, Self, Strategies, and Support).

### **Description of the LINC Program**

All four participants were adult Chinese immigrants who had lived in Canada for less than five years, had intermediate or higher English language proficiency, and were from the predominant Han ethnic group in China. They were all qualified to participate in a particular institution's LINC program

because they were all permanent residents of Canada. The institution's name cannot be disclosed due to confidentiality.

The institution's website provides details about the LINC program, which are described next. The institution offers various CLB levels, such as CLB 2 to 8, which are aligned with the CLB framework. CLB 2 classes focus on teaching students the fundamentals of the English language used for basic communication in daily situations. On the other hand, higher CLB levels that my participants were enrolled in helped to prepare students with essential skills, such as workplace skills. LINC program levels 6 to 8, in which the participants were enrolled, lasted for three and a half months per semester, and aimed to enhance the language skills of permanent residents. The Canadian government fully funded this LINC program to eligible students at no cost.

Prior to enrolling in the LINC courses, all four participants confirmed they had taken English language evaluation at authorized English language examination centres, such as the Calgary Language Assessment and Referral Centre (CLARC). Additionally, Catherine mentioned that she did not have to retake the assessment in Calgary since she had already taken the evaluation in Ontario about a year ago. According to CCLCS (2023), if a student, such as Catherine, wishes to transfer credits to another school, their benchmarks must be certified by the previous institution.

The participants provided more details about the LINC program. All four participants mentioned that they were attending the LINC classes that were delivered in a hybrid model. The participants attended classes in person from 9: 30 am to 2: 30 pm on Mondays and Tuesdays and attended online classes from 9: 30 am to 12: 00 pm from Wednesdays to Fridays. The institution also offered free childcare services to eligible clients. In Table 3, I summarize the key features of the LINC program that my participants attended.

Table 4

*The LINC Program*

<b>Feature</b>	<b>LINC Program</b>
Program Type	Federally funded
Eligibility	Permanent residents
Language Levels	CLB 6-8
Cost	Free
Support Services	Free childcare services
Delivering Model	Hybrid model: In person on Mondays and Tuesdays, and online from Wednesdays to Fridays.
Time	Full time, Monday to Thursday from 9:30 am-2:30pm, and Friday from 9:30 am to 12 pm

**Findings from a Portrait of Each Participant**

I conducted a semi-structured interview of between 30 minutes to 50 minutes with each participant. Following each interview, I used a reflective journal to write down my thoughts and ideas and to promote transparency with my supervisor throughout the research process. Data was collected from four participants. To organize the findings, I employed the 4S System of transition theory to painting a portrait of each participant's experience.

***Jam***

Jam and her family immigrated to Canada in 2019. At that time, she was 39 years old, and her oldest son was five years old. Her second son was born in Canada; he was three years old at the time of the interview. Jam obtained a Bachelor of Law degree from China, where she worked as a consultant lawyer for over ten years. She decided to immigrate with her family due to her older son's unhappiness at school in China.

**Situation.** Upon arrival in Canada, Jam’s family settled in a small town in Saskatchewan, where she worked as a cleaner in a bowling alley. Although Jam attended a part-time online English language training program in Saskatchewan, she found that the half-hour weekly online training was insufficient for improving her English-speaking skills. Additionally, she said that her English language proficiency was still a hurdle for employment purposes as her speaking skills needed to be better developed, despite having passed the College English Test-6 (CET-6) in China. Research has shown the benefits of gaining English language proficiency, such as obtaining better-paying jobs. (Larrotta (2019).

In 2022, Jam’s family moved to Calgary. She took the English language CLB test and scored 5 in speaking, 8 in reading, 6 in writing, and 5 in listening. Then, she enrolled in the LINC program to reach CLB-8 proficiency to qualify for a Social Work program. She also started remote work for a Chinese company for two to three hours per week, which did not require English language proficiency. Despite her educational background, Jam found it challenging to secure a job in Canada that aligned with her expertise due to her limited English language skills, particularly in speaking and listening. Her husband also started to work for a Chinese company in Calgary. Fortunately, her family’s financial situation remained stable, allowing them to avoid financial stress since they had saved enough money before immigrating to Canada. Jam emphasized the importance of a stable financial situation. She said, “If our financial situation is not good enough to support our families, uh, for me, I think I will give up [on immigrating to Canada].”

**Self.** Jam has found Canada to be a happier and freer place for her family, especially her older son. She said, “My sons, especially my older son, he feels much happier than he was in China.” She also appreciated the freedom of speech in Canada and preferred to stay here, even though she could earn more money doing her professional job in China.

Jam stated that she had always been optimistic and believed in finding solutions to problems. She also mentioned that she enjoyed facing challenges and had confidence in dealing with transitions. Even though after coming to Canada, she immediately found it challenging to communicate with others in English, she made significant progress after learning the language. She pointed out:

Even four months before I cannot use English to communicate with others. When someone called me in English, I need to ask my husband to help. But now, although my speaking is not so [fluent], sometimes I make grammar mistake, I still can express my main ideas and I can make others understand me, yeah, so that's a big improvement for me, yeah.

Moreover, Jam perceived that her prior educational and professional experiences had equipped her with transferable skills, especially communication skills, that helped her deal with the challenges she faced in Canada. She was confident that these skills would also help her succeed in becoming a social worker in Canada. She stated:

You know [as] the law consultant we have so many transmission [transferable] skills, just like communicate we can communicate with our constructor [consultant] very how to say very easily. We know what they want. I think the social worker also need these skills, communication skills. I'm always interested in the communication with other people like. And I think as a law consultant [consultant lawyer] I always have some skills that we can solve complex problems. So, I think maybe I can [be a social worker in future]. That's what I I'm interested in and that is what I'm good at. So that's why I want to become a social worker.

**Supports.** The most significant support Jam had received came from her husband who, she stated, had been a great partner. Jam's husband has always taken care of their children. Jam stated, "He is a good husband. He always shares this responsibility to take care of my sons. For example, he send[s]

them ski or to a particular some math class or some swimming class. So, and sometimes he cook[s] for them.”

Jam appreciated her husband’s willingness to share the responsibility of caring for their children and supporting her Canadian aspirations. Jam said, “my husband he support[s] me to do what I want to do.” Her husband’s financial support has allowed Jam to focus on her studies and pursue other educational goals. Jam explained further, “His job is, as he worked as a trader. How to say, international trader manager. His speaking and listening English is [sic] good, but he is just not good at writing and reading.” Lastly, Jam’s husband took charge of tasks that required speaking while Jam handled written correspondence with others because her husband was good at speaking and listening, and Jam was good at reading and writing.

Jam has also received support from her friends in Saskatchewan and Calgary. She was able to enhance her English communication skills by communicating with her Saskatchewan friends, who are native English speakers. On the other hand, her friends in Calgary, who speak Mandarin, provided her with valuable information about free workshops and educational resources. Although Jam’s friends in Calgary could not help her improve her English communication skills, she was grateful for their assistance. However, she noted that people in Calgary were less patient than those in small towns, which sometimes made her feel stressed. Jam stated, “the people here, they are nice here [in Calgary], but they are not so patient. I think that’s because the people in the big city they always are much busier than the people in the small town.” Lastly, Jam’s parents and sisters in China offered her emotional support, and she did not have to worry about her parents because her sisters continue to take care of them.

**Strategies.** Jam identified strategies to improve her English language skills and actively worked towards them. Jam said, for example, she liked to watch *Ted Talks*, *Old Friends*, *Young Sheldon*, and

*The Big Bang Theory*. She commented that learning English in this way was much easier and more entertaining. Jam noted:

After we need to spend almost five or six hours in English class from Monday to Friday, so sometimes I feel a little tired after the schools. So, I always use this watch some dramas in English or listen [to] some radio in English and that's more *[sic]* easier, just like entertainment, and I also can improve my English listening and speaking very well through this method.

Jam has noticed the strategies used by her instructors in class. Jam shared that providing practice opportunities with relevant materials in context was a practical approach to language learning as it helped students to learn vocabulary and grammar in context and practice using them in real-life situations. Moreover, Jam appreciated when the instructors created a positive and supportive learning environment to motivate and engage students. Jam pointed out that instructors could establish a strong rapport with their students for effective teaching and learning by displaying qualities, such as patience, friendliness, and helpfulness.

### ***Alicia***

Alicia and her family moved to Canada in 2019 when she was 38 years old. At the time of the interview, her daughter was eight years old, and her son was two. Alicia obtained her bachelor's degree in Spanish in China and had worked in Venezuela for over ten years as a Spanish Chinese interpreter and administrator before immigrating to Canada.

**Situation.** Alicia's husband received a Canadian work permit while they were living in Venezuela. Last year (2022), Alicia received her Permanent Resident card. When Alicia first arrived in Calgary, she mentioned that she liked the education that her children could receive here but had concerns about the cold weather. After arriving in Canada, she felt more comfortable living here. She attributed this to spending most of her time indoors, where it was warm, and experiencing a relatively

mild winter that year. She said, “I’m very happy. Well, I’m better off being living here because the people very nice, and also my kids have received good education. Yeah so, I feel happy here.” She further stated this point of view:

In that moment I just care about the weather in Canada because I heard it was so cold, yeah but yeah. So, we moved here. And yeah, at the beginning, yes, it was very cold, but one thing is that here the [sic] most of the time we stayed at home. So, it was warm and, in the home, in the mall or everywhere so and recently, especially this year. The weather was very good, yeah. It is better than other years. So yeah, we feel more comfortable here.

In terms of her English language proficiency, Alicia began learning English in middle school when she was 12 years old. She had no English exams at the university level in China and had not used English for a long time. After arriving in Canada, she completed an Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) assessment at an immigration centre. Although she did not specify in which English language area, she received a benchmark score between 7 and 8. Since September 2022, Alicia has been enrolled in the LINC 8 class.

During the interview, Alicia revealed that despite not having any work experience in Canada, she had been considering various career options. She stated:

I have several ideas, but one is that as I told you, I maybe I probably I want to learn psychology in University of Calgary, but the problem is that I have two kids and they are still need my support and company, so I need to calculate my energy also and also my time, everything and another. Maybe I will find some job. And maybe because I haven’t [had] any experience in here, so probably I will find some job, ideal job for me in the market.



Alicia expressed her intention to gain work experience in Calgary before making any decisions regarding formal training in child psychology. She decided to postpone her plans for psychology training due to her tendency to forget details easily and the other reasons mentioned above.

**Self.** Alicia stated that she considered herself a good learner and an optimistic person who liked to challenge herself. During her time in Venezuela, she had the opportunity to travel to many countries, which gave her the confidence to adapt quickly to new environments. Alicia stated:

I'm a very optimistic person and I like to challenge myself. All my life and also another way is

I'm a good learner, so I have open minded. I lived in Venezuela for many years. I traveled a lot of countries, so that's I feel. This is why I feel like I can adapt [everywhere] very quickly.

Furthermore, Alicia stated that she could learn things quickly, particularly language-related skills, due to her experience working as an interpreter in various companies with different projects. As part of her role, she needed a vast vocabulary and could easily understand the meaning of words. Alicia added details to this point:

I am an interpreter, and I worked in several companies. Each company have the different project, so I need to know a lot of vocabulary, new words and the new... Since I translated a lot of documents and project documents, law documents and the administration documents, so [sic] I catch the word and the meaning very quickly. So that's why I learn everything very quickly.

Regarding her English language proficiency, Alicia shared that she struggled with speaking, specifically with pronouncing vowels and understanding addresses. However, she perceived that the LINC program instructor was helpful in improving her skills. Moreover, Alicia perceived that each of her classmates had their own strengths, with some being proficient in writing and others having a rich vocabulary. Alicia pointed out:

Of course, we learn from each other because each classmate [has] the different strengths and weaknesses. Yeah, some is very good at listening; some is very good at writing, but mostly is like the. How to say we don't share our assessment or our like writing something stuff with each other, but we talk a lot. And as the class, the teacher also ask[s] questions. So, you will feel that they [classmates] have the good listening, and they have rich vocabulary in this category or in this area. So, we learn from each other.

**Support.** Alicia has received support from various sources, including her friends, family members, LINC program instructor, and community. She has developed deep relationships with friends from Mexico, Venezuela, and China, although they did not specifically assist her in learning English. At the time of the interview, Alicia's mother lived in Calgary to help her take care of her children, and her husband provided financial support as he worked. Her husband also took their daughter to school since it was close to their house, and Alicia took their son to daycare at her study institution, where she attended the LINC program.

Alicia found the LINC program instructor to be a valuable source of support in improving her writing skills. The instructor had a master's degree in education, with a focus on writing, and Alicia described her as a wonderful teacher. The instructor helped her with learning transitions, word coordination, conjunction fragments, grammar problems, and the use of accurate words in descriptive sentences. After receiving feedback from the instructor, Alicia would rewrite her assignments if she had made many mistakes. However, her writing had improved drastically by the time of the interview, and she no longer needed to rewrite whole papers after receiving feedback. Alicia credited this improvement to consistent feedback and guidance received from the instructor.

In addition to the LINC program, Alicia found that the free English classes offered to newcomers were unsuitable, so she quit. Her complete statement of this point is included below:

Another thing is that I got the permanent residence last June. So yeah, so like the how to say they give like newcomers they give you like free English class yeah but it's very low and it's not suitable for me so and also, I would say I have the son. He is quite a little. I want to say I calculate my time and my energy, so, I quit this benefit. I prefer like do [it] by myself.

Moreover, Alicia received support from participating in church and library activities. She started going to church in downtown Calgary in 2019 to have free English conversation, although she stopped attending after the pandemic because her family moved out of downtown. Alicia also participated in free conversation activities at the library and continued to visit the library every Thursday because it was close to her home. She found the volunteers in the library to be friendly and helpful, and that many people liked to attend the class there because the activities offered there were fun.

**Strategies.** Alicia employed various strategies to improve her English language proficiency, with which she identified herself. One such strategy was creating a learning environment that fostered English language acquisition. For instance, she attended free conversation activities at church and the library, providing opportunities to immerse herself in an English-speaking environment. She also read books and listened to the radio in English, with a particular interest in child psychology books and *Ted Talks* and *CBC Radio News*, which she believed to be beneficial exercises for generating ideas. Additionally, she learned from her classmates, whom she recognized had unique strengths, such as strong vocabulary and writing skills.

Alicia mentioned that she valued certain strategies used by her LINC program instructor. Specifically, she appreciated the instructor's use of topic conversations and group discussions to enhance her comprehension and communication skills. Additionally, Alicia noted that the instructor emphasized repetition as a means of reinforcing learning, such as by practising the use of specific words to construct sentences while studying Canadian democracy and freedom rights.

The instructor also provided exercises to improve students' interview skills and offered feedback on their speaking skills. Students were asked to record themselves speaking so that the instructor can assess their progress. As previously mentioned, Alicia appreciated the instructor providing immediate feedback to enhance her writing. Lastly, the instructor offered student with opportunities to do presentations in class, which Alicia also found beneficial.

### ***Emily***

Emily and her family immigrated to Canada in June 2022 when she was 32 years old. At the time of the interview, her son was about two years old. Emily obtained her bachelor's and master's degrees in computer science in China. She had worked as an Information Technology (IT) programmer in China for more than ten years.

**Situation.** The reason Emily and her family immigrated to Canada was because she wanted her son to enjoy his adolescence by not having as much homework as adolescents typically have in China. Emily stated that she felt good about her daily life in Canada. However, when she wanted to find a job or pursue formal education at a college, she felt stressed. She was aware that meeting English language proficiency requirements was a prerequisite for admission into a formal IT training program in Calgary. Emily considered working as an IT programmer in Calgary. She applied for one IT program job but did not receive an interview.

Emily started learning English in Grade 5. After coming to Canada, Emily did the Canadian Language Benchmark Placement Test (CLBPT), where she received a speaking score of 5, a listening score of 5, a reading score of 7, and a writing score of 4. She then enrolled in the LINC program in October 2022 but quit after one week to focus on studying for her driver's license knowledge test. In February 2023, she enrolled in the LINC-6 class.

Emily had the option to use either the LINC program or the IELTS test to meet the language proficiency requirements for the IT program admission requirements. The LINC program is free for new permanent residents, whereas the IELTS test is not. Emily needed a minimum score of six on the IELTS exam to pass. With the LINC program, Emily most likely could advance one level every two semesters. Emily commented, “The fastest way is to pass IELTS. I need to better Grade 6 or 6 to 6.5.” Even though the IELTS exam was a faster option, Emily knew that she needed to pay fees to take the exam and did not feel confident about her ability to pass the test based on her current level of English language proficiency. Therefore, Emily chose to start with the LINC program instead, which is offered for free.

Emily found the LINC program’s free daycare for her son to be inconvenient because the program itself is located far away from her home. On days when LINC classes were online, lots of time was spent commuting with her child both to and from the daycare. As a result, she enrolled her child in a daycare closer to their home and applied for assistance which allowed for daycare costs to be partially covered through the Canada Children’s Plan.

**Self.** Emily expressed that she felt happier in China than in Canada and attributed this to her lack of employment in Canada. She mentioned that she tended to focus on the negative aspects of situations, which made it difficult for her to feel happy and overcome challenges. However, her husband provided her with positive support and encouragement, which allowed her to develop a more optimistic outlook on life.

Even though Emily could communicate with her husband and friends in Mandarin, she believed that it was not conducive to her long-term goals. Emily recognized the importance of improving her English language proficiency to adjust to life in Canada. She understood that English was necessary for daily interactions with others in public places, such as shopping malls and banks. Emily said:

Maybe because I'm in Canada, I need a good English to communicate with others. For example, to shopping or go shopping or go to a bank or something else, so, I think I need to do it by myself, so English is important and necessary.

**Support.** Emily received support from multiple sources, including her husband, friends, and institutions. During her time as a full-time student in the LINC program, Emily's husband played a crucial role in providing financial support as he supported the family by taking up a part-time job. In addition, he also helped with family responsibilities, such as managing household chores and taking care of their child, such as dropping off and picking up the child from daycare. Furthermore, he provided Emily with emotional support by encouraging her and cheering her up when she felt down.

In addition to her husband's support, Emily's friends provided her with emotional support by offering encouragement and sharing learning resources through WeChat. This support proved to be instrumental as it helped Emily acquire valuable educational resources. Alongside her friends, Emily also received support from the LINC program, which allowed her to improve her English skills. Additionally, Emily received financial aid from the daycare subsidy institution, which helped cover some of her daycare expenses.

**Strategies.** Emily employed self-identified strategies and observed strategies that the LINC program instructor used to improve her English learning. To understand the meaning of new words, she would use the context provided in the sentence to infer meaning to these words. Emily shared her effective method for acquiring new vocabulary. She said:

When I was a student, I remember a new word. At first, I if I come across a new word, I will write it down in my notebook and before I go to sleep, I will read the few words in the list. I'm sorry [coughing]. I will read several times until I remember them, then then tomorrow I will remember them.

Moreover, Emily incorporated various other methods, such as watching American TV shows like *The Big Bang Theory*, reading short stories in English, and listening to English music. After being enrolled in the LINC program for a month, Emily noticed that the instructor would administer daily tests, assessments, or quizzes, which she found to be an effective strategy for consolidating her learning.

### ***Catherine***

Catherine and her family immigrated to Canada in 2020 when she was 39 years old. At the time of the interview, her oldest son was 14 years old, and her youngest son was 6. Catherine received two bachelor's degrees in China: A Bachelor of Business Administration and a Bachelor of English Language. She also received a degree of Master of Business Administration (MBA).

**Situation.** Even though Catherine and her husband had good jobs and were well-paid in China, they decided to immigrate to Canada. Catherine said:

I think for me moving to Canada is a very wise choice, and now my husband, he also agrees with me. But before we came to Canada, he didn't want to come. Because we have a pretty good job in China and with good pay, and the job is stable, not like here you maybe I mean you may be laid off anytime. But I think our family is a good family so we can overcome this kind of difficulty together.

Catherine started to learn English in Grade 3 in China. During her bachelor's program, she enrolled in a concurrent dual-degree program that lasted for five years, with her second major being English. She passed the Professional English Test (PET) level 8 in China and scored an overall six on the IELTS exam. After graduation, she worked in various roles, including procurement specialist, contract specialist, and internal auditor, which did not require her to speak English.

When Catherine arrived in Toronto in 2020, she took the English language CLB test and scored 7 in speaking and reading and 5 in writing and listening sections. After attending a LINC class in

Toronto for a month, Catherine worked at a Chinese engineering company in Calgary as a supply chain management assistant, where she had to communicate with Canadian suppliers in English. However, as most of her colleagues at the company spoke Chinese, she had limited opportunities to practice spoken English. Catherine stated that she was fortunate to find this job quickly due to a referral from a friend.

Catherine's family came to join her in Calgary a year later. Because she found it difficult to balance her family duties with work responsibilities, Catherine resigned from her job at the Chinese engineering company. She explained the reasons for this:

Because it is a Chinese company, and I was a supply chain management assistant. I need to communicate with the headquarter. But this there is time jet [time zone gap]. Time jet, right? and I sometimes they need us to have meeting with them at night, so I have no time to cook, and I have no time to take my son to the after-school program. And I always stay late until around 11 or 12:00 o'clock. That is not good, and my husband, he he's not at home so I feel I was too busy. I could not handle so many things.

After resigning from that job, Catherine had to look for a new job. She noticed that she needed to improve her English language proficiency for employment purposes. Therefore, Catherine pushed herself to speak with others, including customer service agents from banks, utility companies, and insurance companies, despite struggling to understand Canadian accents initially. In January 2022, Catherine began attending a six-month English language training course in the LINC 5/6 class on Saturdays. In September 2022, she became a full-time student in the LINC 7/8 class. At the time of the interview, Catherine was enrolled in the LINC 8 program.

Catherine spoke Chinese at home with her children as she was worried that they might forget how to speak Chinese. Catherine supported this point by saying:



We speak in Chinese because I don't worry about their English. Their English are pretty good now. Their ELL assessment is 5, so the highest like the natives. I just worry that they will forget Chinese. So, in in our house we speak in Chinese.

**Self.** Catherine stated that she was always optimistic. She believed in an old Chinese saying, "Che Dao Shan Qian Bi You Lu," which means that when she comes to a mountain, there will always be a road for her to take. She had confidence in her family's ability to overcome difficulties together, saying, "I think our family is a good family so we can overcome this kind of difficulty together."

Catherine recognized the importance of earning money to ensure her family's survival and provide her children better educational opportunities in Canada. She acknowledged that finding a job was the most challenging task in achieving this goal. She said:

The most challenging thing here is to find a job. Yeah, because you need to make money and then you need to live here. And you [*sic*] while we move here, one of the reasons is that we want to give our kids better education. If [we] have no money, [my children] cannot attend kind of after school programs. Mm-hmm. And. So I think that is the most challenging thing.

Catherine highly valued education and took thoughtful steps to ensure her children had access to after-school training courses, such as Taekwondo. Although she aspired to continue her studies, she faced challenges balancing her family responsibilities with pursuing further education. With her husband working outside of Calgary, she had to postpone her formal education until she had fewer family obligations.

Friendship was an important aspect of Catherine's life, which she highly valued. She considered herself as an easy-going person and had many friends in China. Furthermore, her strong social network played a pivotal role in her successfully finding a job so quickly. Within just one month of arriving in

Canada, Catherine secured a job opportunity. She attributed this to a former colleague who had lived in Canada for 20 years and introduced her to the company.

**Support.** Catherine's husband provided her with financial support, despite his busy schedule working as an electrician in the oil fields outside of Calgary. Although he could only spend five days at home during his two-week shifts, Catherine appreciated his hard work and dedication. Catherine said, "I think he is a very smart and diligent person because actually in China, he has been a manager."

Since arriving in Canada, Catherine has made many friends. When she first moved to Toronto, her new friends were primarily Chinese who seldomly spoke English. However, after moving to Calgary, she had opportunities to talk to native English speakers, primarily through interacting with her sons' friends and their parents. Communicating with her English-speaking friends has supported Catherine in practicing her listening and speaking skills. For example, while her sons were attending Taekwondo training, Catherine had the opportunity to chat with other parents in English. Furthermore, Catherine's family received additional financial support from her uncle and parents, which allowed her to purchase a house. Catherine said, "my uncle and my parents. Yeah, they support us a lot. Yeah, they supported us to buy the house."

**Strategies.** She felt comfortable communicating with others in casual settings. However, after immigrating to Canada, Catherine had a difficult time with understanding Canadian accents because she had learned British English while studying at a university in China. She said:

Because in China we studied British English. The pronunciation and the way of expression are quite different from what we have learned. For example, the first time I came to Canada, and we went to the hotel, the reception asked us "How can I do for you then?" I didn't understand him because we learned that is "What can I do for you?" I think you know that. And the way of pronunciation is very different from British English. So, I think the most difficult thing for me is

the listening. I can't understand people, especially with when they speak a little bit fast. I cannot catch what they are talking about.

Catherine implemented several strategies to enhance her communication skills in Canada. Whenever she had trouble understanding others, she would politely ask them to repeat themselves, saying, "Beg your pardon?" or "Could you please speak a bit more slowly?" Catherine used another strategy to improve her spoken English was to talk to others. As previously mentioned, Catherine maximized her opportunities to speak English by using phone services with English-speaking callers and engaging in conversations with other parents while her son practiced Taekwondo.

Catherine found the teaching methods used by the LINC program instructor enjoyable and effective. She appreciated how the instructor made the teaching content engaging, unlike her instructors in China, who often used rote memorization. One of the interesting ways to learn was by using interactive quizzes on Kahoot, as Catherine mentioned. Catherine also learned a lot about Canadian society, culture, and the medical system. Studying these topics helped her expand her vocabulary and improve her pronunciation skills. Catherine commented, "I think the most helpful thing is to attend [the] LINC class."

The instructor provided students with plenty of online resources to study independently. Catherine reflected, "I think they have used all kinds of tools and ways to help us. Yeah, they teach us a lot and give us a lot of online sources to let us study online by ourselves." The instructor used flexible assessments. Catherine stated, "Because our teacher can let us to challenge 7. Last semester, I mean for example, even my writing and listening is 5, she has two set of assessment paper I mean CLB 6 and CLB 7. If you told to your teacher that you wanted to try CLB 7, then she will give you. She would give you the 7 paper that if your success then you can get 7. You can just skip 6 directly to 7." In the context

of this research, the term “flexible assessment methods” refers to instructors permitting students to select the English proficiency level test that they feel confident in challenging.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I began by describing a case study of adult Chinese immigrants who enrolled in the LINC program at an English language training institution in Calgary. I then provided a detailed description of each participant, which was categorized under the 4S System of the transition theory. In Chapter Five, I present the emerging themes and sub-themes by applying the constant comparative method and thematic analysis.

## **Chapter Five: Analysis**

In this chapter, I employ thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008) and the constant comparative method (Merriam, 2009) to analyze the findings described in Chapter Four. Employing thematic analysis allows me to interpret and analyze the data by identifying patterns and themes. In addition, the constant comparative method allows for a thorough comparison of data across participants, enabling the identification of differences and similarities within different thematic categories. Most importantly, all analyses in this chapter directly address the primary research question and the four sub-questions, providing comprehensive insights into the research topic.

### **Overview**

To capture patterns and themes in participants' experiences, the analysis uncovered four key themes concerning the participants' accounts of their transitions in the LINC program, which are as follows:

1. Transitions: The transitions experienced by the participants.
2. Inner Strength: The inner strengths and resources that the participants drew from.
3. Strategies: Strategies to deal with transitions and learning English.
4. Support: The external supports and resources that the participants identified.

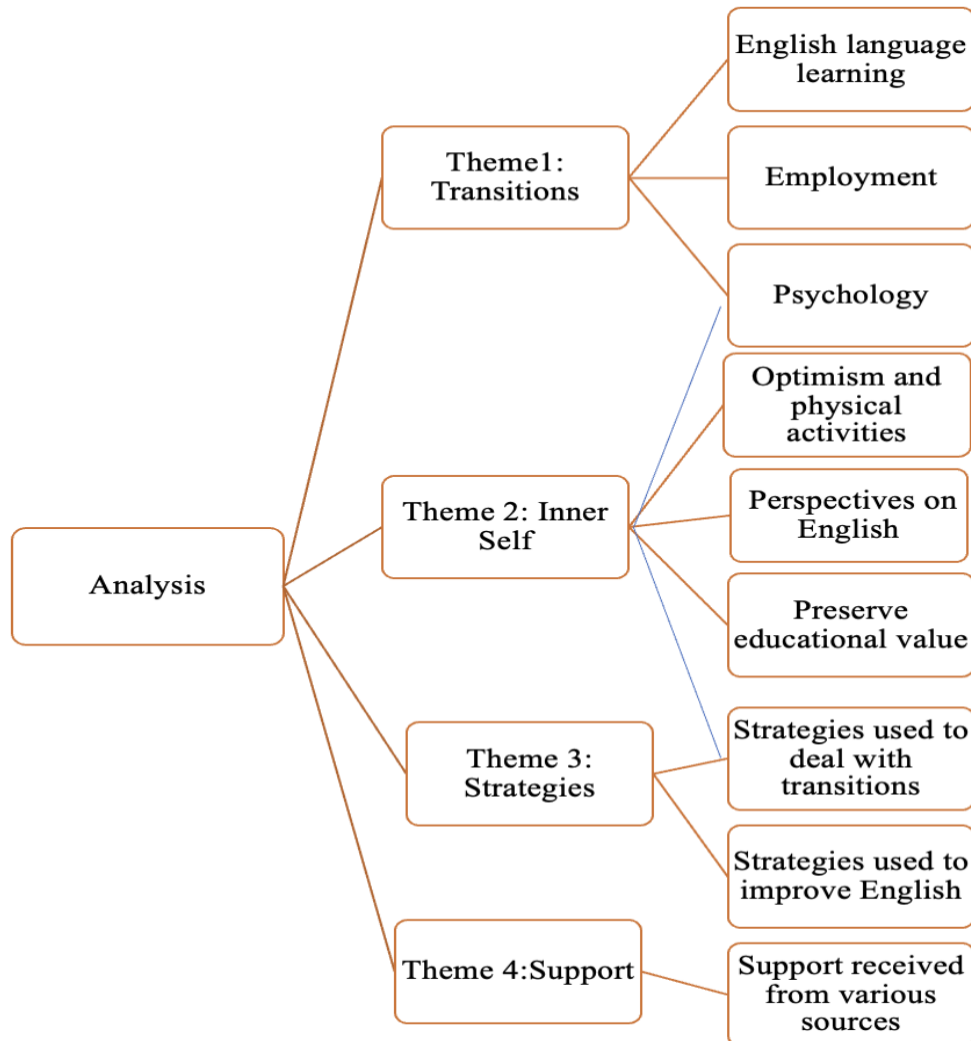
I provide detailed analysis under each of the aforementioned theme based on the collected data. In addition to exploring these themes separately, I also identify certain ideas that emerge across multiple themes. For instance, the concept of optimism can be viewed as both an inner strength and a strategy employed to cope with transitions. The participants' positive approaches to adjusting to psychological changes can be seen as a manifestation of both inner strength and effective coping strategies during transitions. By delving into these nuanced connections and overlaps between themes,

a richer and more nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and coping mechanisms emerges.

In Figure 6, I display the themes and sub-themes that are discussed in this chapter. I provide in depth analysis of each theme.

Figure 6

*Themes*



### Theme One: Transitions

The first theme that emerged was the transitions participants had experienced. In addition to experiencing geographic changes, participants also experienced multiple other transitions

simultaneously. In this section, I analyze these transitions, which include changes in English language learning, employment, and psychological self. The significance of the transitions that participants had experienced before attending or while attending the LINC program was revealed through a comparison of the findings among them. This analysis was conducted in response to the first sub-question, “What does the term transitions mean to participants?” Additionally, it should be mentioned that even though participants did not explicitly define transitions, I considered any changes resulting from the events or non-events mentioned in each participant’s case as transitions.

### ***Transition One: English Language Learning Transition Experiences***

One critical transition experienced by participants was related to their English language learning. Through continued constant comparison of findings, I found that all four participants started learning English in their early school years in China. However, after graduating from university and starting to work, they did not use English frequently. The findings showed that these English language learning experiences in China were not sufficient to prepare participants to communicate with others in English in Canada. This perspective was best expressed by Jam:

Most of Chinese students we learn English just through the use [of] their eyes they just reading and writing. They spend so much time on reading and writing. When they didn’t use their ear to listen. So that why I found that most of the Chinese students they are good at reading and writing, but not good at speaking and listening. So now I when I found this situation, I spent much more time on listening and speaking rather than writing and reading. So, if you want to improve your English for Chinese student, you need to spend much more time on reading and speaking. because that’s the different systems. In your mind. We don’t only use your visual.

Upon arriving in Canada, participants realized the importance of having a good level of English language proficiency for their educational and employment opportunities. Therefore, participants

actively engaged in activities to improve their English. Three participants had short-term English language learning experiences in Canada before enrolling in the LINC program. Jam had attended a part-time, half an hour each week, online English language training program in Saskatchewan, which she felt was too little. In October 2022, Emily enrolled in a LINC program and left the program after a week of study because she wanted to concentrate on getting ready for her driver's licence knowledge test. Catherine attended a LINC class in Ontario for a month and left the program because she found a job. After the short-term transition experience of learning English, they all enrolled in the full-time LINC program.

A snapshot of the participants' English language learning experiences is presented in Table 5, including their age when they started learning English, the types of tests they completed, and their self-reported proficiency levels.

Table 5

*Participants' English Language Learning Experiences*

Category	Jam	Alicia	Emily	Catherine
Age when they started learning English	Middle school (13 yrs.)	Middle school (12 yrs.)	Grade 5	Grade 3
Types of English Tests	CET-6 in China; English test in Canada (S: 5; L: 5; R: 8; W:6)	English language test at Women Centre in downtown (S: 7; L: 7; R: 8; W:8)	CET-6 in China; CLBPT in Canada (S: 5; L: 5; R: 7; W:4)	IELS in China (overall grade 6); Professional English Test level 8 in China; CLB at Newcomer Centre in Toronto (S:7; L:5; R:7; W:5)



Self-reported Proficiency Levels	Not good in speaking and listening; Good in reading and writing	Very bad in speaking; good at reading; made big progress in writing in LINC program; improved listening	Not good in speaking; better in reading	Writing and listening skills not well; used to be afraid of speaking English
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Furthermore, all four participants had to take care of their children and operate other family duties while attending the LINC program. In my researcher's reflective journal, I wrote that for all four participants, balancing their family responsibilities, such as caring for their children and managing home chores, with their full-time LINC study was challenging. Maintaining the balance between full-time study and family duties required dedication and discipline, as it requires efficient time management. This was only possible through the support they received and the strategies they utilized to cope with the challenges of transitioning. Further details about the support and strategies will be discussed in later sections of this chapter.

### ***Transition Two: Employment Changes***

The findings revealed that despite having professional work experiences and degrees from higher educational institutions in China, the participants were unable to find comparable jobs in Canada to the ones that they had in China due to their lack of English language proficiency, Canadian work experience, and educational background. Perhaps Jam was the one who best described this issue:

I lost my career. I think I lost my lawyer's consultant career now. Although I still work for only one company, but [*sic*] I think that was not my major work now. So.....my major work in the bowling arena is that I clean up the bowling arena every day. So, it is for me. It's hard to go back to become a lawyer consultant in Canada because my English is not so good, and the door is a difference between these two companies.

In my reflective journal, I wrote that even though Jam's level of English was not fluent, she might be overqualified for low-skilled labour jobs, such as working as a cleaner in a bowling alley. Other participants also faced similar problems. Therefore, all participants expressed their interest in pursuing formal education in Canada to enhance their skills and qualify for higher-skilled jobs. However, two participants hesitated to take full-time formal training due to various reasons, such as family duties. Alicia shared:

I haven't decided [to take formal training] because as I told you, this depends on my time. Also, I need to do more research about psychology here because I heard a lot of versions and I also know my limitations. ....I need to if I will learn psychology here, you know it's at least it takes me like 4 years of bachelor's degree. So, I need to have make a good plan. For the four years and then I need enough time to focus on the how to say the study and need to balance my life is like with my kids.

This perspective was also illustrated by Catherine:

So actually, I want to study education. But at the current situation, maybe I cannot because I'm busy. Umm and. We have not enough money for me to go to the university. Maybe later when my older son, he graduated, I will think about it to study education.

All participants were aware that full-time vocational training required a more significant time and financial commitment than attending an English training program. As a result, they recognized the importance of creating solid plans to participate in full-time vocational training. In my researcher's reflective journal, I reflected, "Middle-aged participants who are wives and mothers may have to make sacrifices in their educational or employment opportunities when these opportunities conflict with participants' family duties." I noted that many factors influenced the participants' employment transition experiences (Anderson et al., 2012). Specifically, their interests in a specific specialization determined

their formal education major, while family commitments could significantly influence their decision to pursue formal education for higher-skilled employment.

To sum up, data showed that all participants had experienced employment transitions. They had received higher education degrees and had professional work experiences in China. After coming to Canada, they either could not find a job or worked at low-skilled jobs due to many limiting factors. One detrimental factor was that participants lacked English language proficiency. Thus, it is necessary to implement programs that can effectively improve immigrants' English language skills. Another factor was that employers have valued Canadian education and work experiences, but participants have not had those experiences yet. Thus, it is imperative that policymakers develop effective policies for identifying international education and work experience in Canada and offer more higher-skilled job opportunities to newly arrived immigrants.

### ***Transition Three: Psychological Transitions***

The participants experienced various psychological changes after immigrating to Canada. For instance, Jam expressed feeling much happier in Canada as she believed that she had more freedom of speech and that her older son could receive a better education. Jam shared, "I become [much] happier [here] because in China my son, especially my older son he didn't feel very happy in school." She added, "I'm in Canada. I can speak, I can say what I want to say." Despite not being fluent in spoken English, Jam remained confident and hopeful about improving her language skills. Similarly, Alicia also had a positive experience living in Calgary. Catherine said, "I think living in Canada is much better than in China because we can live in bigger house and our kids are happier. Yeah, and. The air is good, the food is good. And we can go to Banff to go camping, hiking. That's good."

However, Emily had a different experience, expressing that she felt happier living in China because she had not yet found a job in Canada. Emily said, "I think maybe I mean in China I am

[happier]...perhaps because I have no job in Canada” She also shared, “For normal life I feel is good. It is OK. I have no special feelings. And just when I want to find a job or I want to attend the college for something academic, I feel stressful.”

To sum up, through the interviews I conducted with participants, the data revealed that participants experienced different psychological changes due to geographic transitions. Three participants felt happy about living in Canada for various reasons, such as better educational opportunities for their children, clear air, and a better quality of life. Only one participant did not feel happy about her new life in Canada and expressed that this was due to not having a job working as an IT programmer, as she had done in China.

### ***Summary of Theme One***

All four participants experienced geographic transitions, resulting in various changes which impacted other areas of their lives. In addition to geographic transitions, they all experienced multiple other transitions, including English learning, employment, and psychological adjustments. Dealing with these transitions simultaneously was challenging. In the next theme, I will analyze participants’ inner strengths that could help them handle these transitions.

### **Theme Two: Inner Strengths**

The second theme that emerged from the data in the compared findings is the inner strengths and resources used by each participant. This theme encompasses the inner traits and each participant’s perceptions of their situations. The analysis is in response to the second sub-question, “What inner strengths and resources do participants draw from when dealing with transitions?” The concept of self refers to “the person’s inner strength for coping with the situation” (Schlossberg, 2011, p.160). Please refer to pages 30-31 for more details about the self-concept.

### *Optimism and Physical Activities*

In the first theme, it was noted that three participants expressed feeling happier living in Canada, while Emily felt happier living in China. Despite their varying psychological changes, three participants identified optimism as their inner strength. Only Emily considered herself as pessimistic, but her husband's emotional support helped her develop a stronger sense of self. Emily said, "In my life [my husband] can encourage me and cheer me up and tell me... This will pass away. You can be better." In contrast, Jam and Catherine held a positive perspective and believed that every challenge has a solution. Alicia was also optimistic and had an open mind, challenging herself in various aspects. Alicia said, "I am a very optimistic person, and I like to challenge myself...also I am a good learner, so I have open minded." The data suggested that optimism served as an inner strength, and receiving encouragement from others could further contribute to building inner resilience in coping with transitions.

Another point was that regularly exercising physical activities were found to be significant in contributing to positive inner selves among the participants. Catherine engaged in outdoor activities and enrolled her children in camping and Taekwondo, which provided opportunities for English communication with other parents. Jam regularly went hiking, while Alicia visited the gym for exercise regularly. Alicia said, "I like to do exercise so normally every night. I will go to gym. Yeah, in the dinner time." On the other hand, Emily did not mention any engagement in physical activities, which may have contributed to her pessimism.

The data inferred that engaging in physical activities positively impacted the optimism levels of the three participants, which can be perceived as inner strengths. Furthermore, the participants' increased optimism appeared to lead to a greater likelihood of engaging in exercise. Therefore, the conclusion drawn from the data is that optimism and exercise have a positive correlation.

### ***Participants' Positive Perspectives on English Language Learning***

Participants' positive perspectives on English language learning can be perceived as inner strengths. In this section, I offer insights into participants' perspectives regarding their experience with English language learning in Canada. The participants recognized the importance of improving their English language skills and actively sought opportunities to practice English. This perspective was best supported by Catherine as she stated:

When I moved to here, especially in Calgary, I have many chance[s] to speak English. Hmm. Yeah. And. At the beginning, actually I was a little bit afraid of speaking English because I could not understand people. That's the problem. To speak no problem. But for understand what they are saying, that's the problem. But I forced myself to find a chance to talk with people like you. I need to call the bank, the MasterCard Centre, and I need to call the utility company like that and the insurance company. So, all these calls I made. I thought I speak English; I didn't choose Chinese service. So, practice in this way, yeah.

Furthermore, similar to Catherine's experience of learning English, other three participants also perceived the importance of English, so they also actively sought opportunities to learn English after school. Alicia believed creating an English-learning environment was crucial and immersed herself in it as much as possible. Alicia explained, "I think the good [way] to learn English...say the environment is very important and normally I used to listen radios reading books in English, yeah, that helped me a lot, and also, I like to read books with my kids in English, so sometimes we talk like how to say. We talk English idioms and some jokes in English at home." Similarly, Emily also liked to watch American drama series, such as *The Big Bang Theory* to learn English. Jam preferred to learn English entertainingly, as she often felt exhausted after full-time study in the LINC program.

Moreover, participants had diverse perceptions of using English at home. Alicia used English slang and cracked jokes with her children, while Catherine avoided speaking English to her children at home, as she was more concerned about them losing their Chinese language skills. Catherine attempted to preserve the value of Chinese language, while Alicia perceived home as an English learning environment.

All four participants shared their perspectives on how to learn English. Jam commented on how Chinese students focused too much on reading and writing rather than listening and speaking. Jam suggested:

[Chinese students] need to use your listening systems. I don't [know] how to say, listening.

Yeah, that's listening skill. That's different systems in your mind. Yes, so, I think that for me this is so important. This suggestion may [be] good for all. The Chinese students or the Chinese immigrant who need to improve their listening.

Emily agreed to spend more time on improve her spoken English and valued doing English tests every day. She said, "I think more practice the teacher will give me some test or assessment or quiz. We do it every day and they can make a make a progress." Alicia had the same point as Jam about improving listening skills, but also Alicia spent more time practising her writing. Alicia said, "I have come a long way in my listening and writing." Catherine believed that the ways of learning English in Canada were better than in China. She explained:

I actually think the way of teaching English here. The ways. Yeah, the methods here are much better than those in China. Say that because the I think my teachers, they are more fun. Yeah, they make us happy, and we can learn happily, not just memorize. Yeah, and...There are also other interesting ways to learn, like Kahoot.

The conclusion drawn from the data was that participants' perspectives about the importance of English learning significantly influenced how they improved their English language proficiency. All four participants actively sought opportunities to practice English since they perceived English skills as essential. Moreover, participants shared various effective methods of learning English due to their different perspectives. Notably, some participants found learning English in Canada to be more effective and enjoyable than in China due to the teaching methods used by the instructors. In China, learning English was often centred around memorization, while in Canada, the instructors made the teaching more engaging and entertaining.

### ***Preserving Educational Values***

One of the triggers for the four participants to immigrate to Canada was their desire for better education for their children. Emily said, "the students in China can learn more, but [we] will have more homework..... Too much is too much. It will [take] 5 or 7 hours." Similarly, Jam stated her older son felt unhappy at school in China. After living in Canada, Jam said, "my son[s], especially my older son, he feels much happier than he was in China." Catherine claimed, "I don't think Chinese education is suitable for us, so I'm looking for better education." Alicia also found the education system in China unsuitable for her children. Alicia said, "I'm better off being living here, because the people very nice and also my kids have received good education."

Furthermore, all four participants expressed a strong emphasis on providing better education for their children in Canada. For instance, Emily actively sought educational resources by joining educational groups on WeChat, while Jam also actively sought educational resources from her friends. The data showed that the participants highly value education for their children.

In addition to seeking better education for their children, all four participants actively engaged in educational activities. They all received higher education in China and planned to pursue more formal



higher education or vocational training in Canada. In Table 6, I provide an overview of the participants' educational backgrounds, previous work experiences, and future career aspirations.

Table 6

*Participants' Employment Information*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Jam</b>	<b>Alicia</b>	<b>Emily</b>	<b>Catherine</b>
Educational Record	Bachelor of Law	Bachelor of Spanish Language	Bachelor and Master of computer science	Two bachelors' degree: Bachelor of Business Administration and Bachelor of English language; MBA: Master of Business Administration
Work Experience	Consultant Lawyer in China for over than ten years.; A cleaner at bowling alley in Canada; Working for a Chinese company as a consultant lawyer remotely in Canada.	Spanish Chinese interpreter and administrator for more than ten years in Venezuela.	IT programmer in China for more than ten years; no work experience in Canada	Procurement specialist, contract specialist, and internal auditor for about 10 years in China; supply chain management assistant for an engineering company for one year in Canada.
Career Plan	Social worker	Psychology	IT program related	Educational or career advisor related

In conclusion, the data demonstrated that participants had a strong dedication to preserving the value of education for themselves and their children in Canada. Participants believed that their children would have better educational opportunities in Canada, which was the primary motivation behind their immigration. The participants expressed a preference for the Canadian education system because of less stress and homework compared to China. Participants strived to preserve the value of education after immigrating to Canada and aimed to pursue formal education for better employment opportunities.

However, in my reflective journal, I wrote that despite being dissatisfied with the Chinese educational system, participants' successes were a result of receiving higher education in China.

### ***Summary of Theme Two***

Participants' inner strengths, being optimistic, doing physical exercises, and placing a high value on education assisted them in effectively dealing with transitions. The data showed that doing physical activities regularly and being optimistic positively correlated. Being optimistic and doing physical activities helped participants effectively deal with transitions. The participants' positive perspectives on English language learning motivated them to actively engage in learning English. Participants highly valued education and sought better educational opportunities for their children, leading them to immigrate to Canada. They actively sought educational information and participated in educational-related activities. Since participants benefited from a successful pathway of obtaining higher education and securing stable, high-skilled occupations in China, they appeared to replicate the same pathway for themselves and their children in Canada.

### **Theme Three: Strategies**

Anderson et al. (2012) discussed strategies in various contexts. For example, they proposed a model that includes strategies influencing how individuals deal with transitions. In this section, I summarize the findings from the data regarding strategies that participants have employed to cope with transitions and strategies that can assist participants in enhancing their English language proficiency. This analysis was conducted in response to the third sub-question, "What strategies do participants use to deal with transitions?"

#### ***Inner Strengths as Strategies***

In previous section, I offered details about how participants used their inner strengths to deal with transitions. Inner strengths, which include holding positive perspectives on challenges, engaging in

physical activities, and maintaining high value on education, were identified as effective strategies used by participants to handle transitions. Jam perhaps best described optimism as an inner strength to handle transitions:

I am always optimistic. I think if you face some problem, there are always some answers stand there. You need to, you just need to go ahead and then you can find some. Find how to say the solve them for that. So, It's OK for me because that's up to your confidence and your characteristic. Yeah, I think my characteristic is always optimistic, and I always welcome to the challenge. It's not so hard for me, I just enjoy the time when [I] face some challenge.

The data showed that optimism was an inner strength for participants in dealing with transitions. Doing physical activities regularly and being optimistic positively correlated. Valuing education was another inner strength for participants in handling transitions. Because participants highly valued education, their transitional experiences were highly related to educational-related activities. The findings revealed that the participants' inner strengths play a crucial role in their ability to manage and cope with various transitions. These inner strengths can be viewed as a set of strategies that are beneficial in navigating through challenging situations.

### ***Strategies to Learn English***

Regarding improving English language proficiency, participants liked to watch dramas and listen to the radio in English. They also liked to maximize chances to talk to others in English to improve their communication skills. More details about these strategies were previously mentioned under the *Participants' Perspectives on English Language Learning* section.

Participants identified several strategies that the LINC program instructors used to improve their English language learning. One of these strategies was creating a flipped classroom to support independent learning. A flipped classroom is an instructional approach that reverses the traditional

teaching format. In traditional classes, students passively receive lectures during class time and complete assignments at home; while in flipped classes, students engage with instructional content outside of class, often through pre-recorded videos or online resources (Låg & Sæle, 2019). Catherine described this flipped classroom teaching model and saying, “I think [the instructors] have used all kinds of tools and ways to help us. Yeah, they teach us a lot and give us a lot of online source[s] to let us study online by ourselves.” In addition to the flipped classroom model, Catherine liked that the instructors created a comfortable and entertaining learning environment. Catherine said, “[the instructors] make us happy and we can learn happily, not just memorize.” Furthermore, Catherine shared that the instructors had employed flexible assessment methods when students needed them. Catherine explained how flexible assessment was implemented in detail:

Because our teacher can let us to challenge 7. Last semester, I mean for example, even my writing and listening is 5, she has two set of assessment paper I mean CLB 6 and CLB 7. If you told to your teacher that you wanted to try CLB 7, then she will give you. She would give you the seven paper that if you. I mean if you success then you can get 7. You can just skip 6 directly to 7.

On the other hand, Alicia liked the instructors who provided imminent feedback to improve her English writing and speaking skills. Alicia said:

We learned about the interview skill is very important to find a good job. So, we practice a lot, and she [the instructor] always corrected us. She asked us to record the speaking and then after that the [*sic*] she give[s] us the feedback, and we try again. So that’s helping a lot.

Alicia stated further about receiving feedback from the instructor. She explained:

[The instructor] helped me a lot. Specially like the transition word coordinator conjunction fragments. Like the grammar issues. Yeah, and also, she helped me a lot to use the accurate

words to describe the sentence. So, each time I wrote the document, and she also gave me the feedback and then I referred her again. If it's necessary, if I did a lot of mistake[s], yes, I will rewrote again. But nowadays, she also found, like I made a lot of progress, so I don't need to rewrite again. I also feel I have a big progress in writing.

Alicia and Jam found it helpful when the instructors incorporated topical conversations into real-life contexts and allowed students to give presentations on these topics. Perhaps Alicia best described how the instructors used this strategy. Alicia explained:

Normally at the school we did a lot of topic conversation like we read an article and then she (the instructor) ask[s] us to use our own language to our own words or own words to describe again the article and discuss with your group or teams. And also, they give us a lot of opportunities to do presentations. We last semester we learned 3 topics, so each topic they give us several like the articles with vocabulary. This is the vocabulary is not familiar. Like for example, we learned about the Canadian democracy and the freedom rights. So that's some specific vocabulary we repeat. To repeat it and this vocabulary to make the sentence.

Since Emily enrolled in the LINC program for about a month, she did not notice many strategies used by the instructor. However, she found one strategy was helpful. She said, "more practice the teacher will give me some test or assessment or quiz. We do it every day and they can make a make a progress." The analysis highlighted various strategies employed by participants and instructors to enhance participants' English language learning in the LINC program.

### ***Summary of Theme Three***

In this section, I analyzed the importance of leveraging inner strengths to deal with transitions and employing a range of strategies to support participants in their English language learning journey. The data revealed that participants utilized their inner strengths as coping strategies during transitions.

The study also showed that participants not only self-identified various strategies to learn English but also recognized the instructors' implementation of various strategies to enhance their English language acquisition.

#### **Theme Four: Support**

In this section, I analyze external supports and resources that participants received while dealing with transitions in the LINC program. Anderson et al. (2012) discussed the significance of support in various contexts. One pertinent context uncovered by the authors in their research is that adult learners who experience a greater level of support over barriers are more likely to succeed in transitioning to college, which aligns with the focus of this research. This theme is in response to the fourth sub-question, "What external supports and resources do participants identify when navigating these transitions?"

##### ***Support from Government, Community, Friends, and Institutions***

In this section, I focus on the support that participants received from various sources, including the Canadian government, communities, friends, institutions, family members, and instructors. The Canadian government provides funding to the LINC program, allowing participants to attend English language training without paying any fees. Participants also received support from their local communities, as exemplified by Alicia's participation in free English conversation events organized by the church and public library.

All four participants received various supports from friends. Jam reported that she actively sought opportunities to practice speaking English with friends in Saskatchewan who are native English speakers to improve her English language proficiency. Jam stated:

When we lived in Saskatchewan, we found that the people in the small town they are nice and friendly and patient. So, we make some White friends there. Yeah, and we celebrate just like we

celebrate the Chinese New Year together. We exchange the gifts with each other on Christmas Day.

Jam also noted that after coming to Calgary, most of her friends were Chinese. While these friends supported her in various ways, they did not specifically help her improve her English language skills. She stated:

I just learn English by myself, but they support me with some News, for example how to say? Some information's in Canada. My friend, always they provide much good information for us. For example, the private school. What's the difference from a private school between a private school and a public school? Where you can find some free lessons in library. So just like this.

Similarly, Emily's friends also shared useful educational information with her. Emily said, "[My friends] will encourage me to study. They will share some link to me. For example, something about listening and writing." Catherine shared that she valued the support of her friends and said:

It's very important. You know why I can get the job within two months after I moved to Canada, it is because the one of my previous colleagues [who] introduced me to that company. Yeah, he gave the refer for me, yeah. Otherwise, I don't think I could find the job so fast; you know? Umm. So, as I say I'm an easy-going person and I had a lot of friends in China, some of them. So, one of these friends, he moved to Canada 20 years ago, I think. So, he knew a lot about here, and he knew a lot of people here. So, he introduced me to that company.

Alicia also developed deep friendships with others even though these friends did not specifically help her to learn English. Alicia said:

I have friends but they don't help me to learn English. They just have like friends from Venezuela also from Mexico and yeah, and also Chinese friends. They are just friend relationship. There is like deeper relationship specific relationship.

The data unveiled that all four participants received various forms of support from their friends, including receiving emotional support, sharing educational-related information, giving referrals for job opportunities, and receiving support to improve their spoken English.

In terms of institutional support, all four participants received support from the institution that offered the LINC program. In addition to the support from the institution, Jam received assistance from the Centre for Newcomers; Emily applied for a childcare subsidy from the Canada Children's Plan, even though she had not received the funding at the time of the interview.

### ***Support from Family***

The participants highlighted the importance of receiving support from family members while dealing with transitions. All four participants spoke positively about their husbands, who could share household responsibilities and provide emotional and financial support. The data also revealed that participants cooperated with their husbands in various ways. Jam and her husband collaborated well to communicate with others in English. She stated:

That's a little interesting because my husband, even he is good at speaking and listening, and I'm good at reading and writing. So, when we need to write something, or we need to read something, that's my business. And if we need to call someone, or we need to talk with someone, my husband, he took his responsibility.

Alicia and her husband collaborate on family duties with each other. Alicia said, "[my husband] takes my daughter to school because it close to my house. I took my son to [the LINC program institution] as I studied there." Emily's husband worked part time and took more family responsibilities so that Emily could continue her full-time study.

While Emily's husband provided her with support to pursue full-time study, Catherine had to take on more family responsibilities due to her husband's work outside of Calgary. Emily explained,



“My husband is supporting me to improve myself so he can make money to support our family. So, I have time to just have full-time study. When I go to class, he will clean the house and send and pick up my kid. And now he is sleeping with my kids.” On the other hand, Catherine shared, “Because my husband is an electrician and needs to go to Fort McMurray for work, within two weeks, there is [sic] only five days he is at home. So, I need to take care of everything by myself.”

The data showed that the husbands of all four participants provided financial support for their families, allowing them to attend the LINC program full-time. On the other hand, while three other participants received support from their husbands with household chores, Catherine had to take charge of most of the family’s responsibilities due to her husband’s job outside of Calgary.

Furthermore, most participants received support from other family members in addition to their husbands. Alicia’s mother was in Calgary to help her do home chores and take care of her children. Catherine’s uncle and parents supported her in purchasing their first house in Canada. Jam’s sisters took more responsibility for caring for her mother in China. However, other than receiving support from her husband, Emily did not mention whether she received support from other family members.

### ***Support from Instructors***

All four participants said that the LINC program instructors gave them valuable and helpful instruction. Some practical instructions participants mentioned were making teaching entertaining, flexible assessment, scenario-based learning, learning about Canadian democracy, providing feedback to improve their English language learning, and creating a flipped classroom by providing students with enough online learning resources. Please refer to the *Strategies to Learn English* section in this chapter for details about the support they each received from the LINC program instructors.

Overall, the data uncovered that the participants' progress in their English language proficiency in the LINC program was largely attributed to the significant external support they received, which appeared to outweigh the challenges they faced.

#### ***Summary of Theme Four***

Participants were provided with external support and resources to deal with transitions in the LINC program. These supports encompassed assistance from various sources such as the Canadian government, communities, friends, institutions, family members, and instructors of the LINC program. Consequently, participants appeared to be able to overcome the challenges and made progress in the full-time LINC program.

#### **Summary**

In this chapter, I employed constant comparative analysis and thematic analysis to analyze and interpret the data, revealing themes and patterns. The four overarching themes uncovered were transitions, inner strengths, strategies, and supports. In Chapter Six, I discuss key research findings related to relevant literature, followed by practical recommendations and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter Six: Discussion and Recommendations**

While previous studies have explored the strategies that immigrants employ (Li et al., 2018; Wang & Christiansen, 2019; Zhang, 2022) and the support they receive (Koehn et al., 2020; Liou & Shenk, 2016) to overcome challenges, a research gap remains in a holistic understanding of the experiences of adult Chinese immigrants in Canada. The purpose of this research is to have an in-depth understanding of adult Chinese immigrants' transition experiences in Canada to help policymakers and instructors more effectively understand and support this demographic in their transition experiences.

The findings indicated that the participants experienced various transitions, including English learning, employment, and psychological changes. The participants identified a range of strategies to deal with these transitions. The participants drew on their inner strengths, including being optimistic, doing physical exercises, and using a positive perspective to face challenges. Just as importantly, they received various types of support from different sources to help them better cope with the transitions they encountered.

The research findings will benefit participants and other immigrants with similar transition experiences, empowering them with valuable tools to navigate transitions more effectively. Additionally, educational professionals will benefit from these findings as they can enhance their effectiveness in teaching adult Chinese immigrants after having a holistic understanding of this demographic. Lastly, policymakers will gain valuable insights from this research, which will increase their awareness of the lived experiences of adult Chinese immigrants.

The findings were in response to the overarching research question: "What strategies and supports are utilized by adult Chinese immigrants dealing with transitions in an English language learning program?" and four sub-questions:

1. What does the term transitions mean to participants?

2. What inner strengths and resources do participants draw from when dealing with transitions?
3. What strategies do participants use to deal with transitions?
4. What external supports and resources do participants identify when navigating these transitions?

## **Overview**

In this chapter, I first present a detailed discussion of the research findings. Based on the study results, I offer recommendations for practice for adult Chinese immigrants and immigrants with similar experiences, instructors teaching this group, and policymakers making policies to support adult Chinese immigrants. Finally, I provide suggestions for future research.

## **Discussion**

In this qualitative research, I focus on four adult Chinese immigrants dealing with transitions in the LINC program. The context of this research in Chapter One and the literature review presented in Chapter Two revealed the complexities of adult Chinese immigrants' English learning experiences in host countries, as well as the impact of immigrant English language proficiency on integration into the host country during transitions. In this discussion section, I contextualize the findings within the broader scope of previous research and examine them under four main themes, which are linked to my four research sub-questions. The four themes are:

1. Transitions
2. Inner Strengths
3. Strategies
4. Supports

## ***Transitions***

The first theme of analysis in Chapter Five focused on the experiences of adult Chinese immigrants in dealing with transitions. Through analysis, participants experienced transitions, including

language learning, employment, and psychological adjustments. The discussion of transitions responds to the first sub-question, “What does the term transitions mean to participants?”

As previously mentioned in Chapter One, a transition is defined as “any event, or nonevent [*sic*] that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Anderson, 2012, p. 39). Therefore, any changes resulting from the events or non-events mentioned in each participant’s case, even if not explicitly defined as transitions by the participants, were considered transitions in the findings. Upon arriving in Canada, all four participants had to navigate multiple transitions, including learning English, searching for employment, and managing psychological adjustments. The findings showed that my participants were dealing with multiple transitions at once, which is consistent with the finding from the research of Anderson et al. (2012). Dealing with multiple transitions at the same time makes the coping process especially difficult. Other transition challenges that my participants faced included how to sufficiently balance home and school life while studying in the LINC program and how to plan future education for themselves and their children.

In summary, these results contribute to the existing knowledge that dealing with multiple transitions simultaneously poses more challenges to immigrants. In the next section, I discuss how they employ inner strengths, such as using positive perspectives, to deal with multiple transitions in a broader context.

### ***Inner Strengths***

In this section, I discuss the research findings on how participants drew on their inner strengths, such as cultivating a positive perspective and placing a high value on education, to deal with multiple transitions. Firstly, I contextualize this discussion within the broader scholarly articles on the topic of having positive perspectives. Secondly, I focus on participants’ perspectives on highly valuing education and explore this topic through other pertinent scholarly articles. My research findings highlight the

significance of participants' perspectives in shaping their transition experiences, particularly in response to the second sub-question: "What inner strengths and resources do participants draw from when dealing with transitions?"

Previous studies have demonstrated that individuals' perspectives have a profound impact on their motivations, attitudes, behaviours, and self-worth (e.g., Bier, 2014). Specifically, the study participants employed a positive outlook to deal with transitions, which aligns with the broader understanding that perspectives and beliefs play a pivotal role in shaping individual experiences and outcomes. Bier (2014) also found that language learners' perspectives and beliefs about language learning influence their motivation and success. Similarly, my research indicated that participants' perspectives on the importance of English language learning played a crucial role in how they approached improving their skills. Thus, for the participants to meet their goals for better employments, they determined that their first step must be to improve their English language proficiency. However, participants hesitated to pursue formal education due to concerns about balancing full-time studies and family responsibilities.

Yet, despite these concerns, my research data showed that fostering a positive outlook when confronting the transitions previously discussed helped participants navigate and effectively overcome the challenges they faced. Specifically, three out of four participants coped with multiple transitions by adopting a positive perspective and viewing these changes as opportunities for personal growth and development. This aligns with Corliss's (2020) article "Staying Positive During Challenging Times" on Harvard Health Blog, where the author emphasizes the benefits of practising positive psychological techniques in managing stress, grief, and difficulties, thus promoting resilience and facilitating quicker recovery from traumatic events. The participants in my study shared a similar perspective, recognizing

that although transitions bring challenges, they also present opportunities for personal growth and development.

Furthermore, this research provides valuable insights that contribute to the existing knowledge of Chinese immigrants' values and attitudes towards education. One significant positive perception that emerged from the study was the participants' perceptions of the value of education, which contributed to their inner strength. In this research, all four participants emphasized the importance of education, having received higher education in China and recognizing its value. The study participants highly valued education, which is consistent with China's historical emphasis on education. This tradition dates to Confucianism, which viewed education as a crucial means of self-cultivation and social advancement (Yang, 2019). This tradition continues today, with China producing more graduates annually than the United States and India combined (Gu et al., 2019).

As previously mentioned, Larrotta and Adversario (2020) researched Chinese immigrants' English learning experiences in the United States and believed that most Chinese are Confucius learners. Confucianism, an influential philosophy in Chinese culture for centuries, regards education as essential in peoples' lives (Li, 2001). In this study, all four participants presented as Confucius learners since they all emphasized placing high value on the importance of education for themselves and their children. Similarly, Li (2001) found that Chinese parents have a strong desire to ensure their children receive a good education, often placing great emphasis on academic achievement (Li, 2001). The research of Hyun et al. (2022) also found that Chinese immigrants highly value their children's education from an early age. The authors highlighted the importance of Chinese immigrant parents flexibly endorsing adaptive behaviours from the mainstream culture while retaining valued features of their Chinese culture. Chinese immigrant parents were also found to hold strong beliefs about the importance of education for their children's social-emotional development and future success (Hyun et al., 2022).

However, as Zhao et al. (2015) pointed out, such high parental expectations can lead to too much academic stress for parents and children.

In my research, all four participants placed high values on education. Their decision to immigrate to Canada was primarily driven by the desire to provide better educational opportunities for their children. For example, the children of participants Jam, Alicia, and Catherine were all enrolled in after-school programs, and they all actively searched for education-related information. Furthermore, Emily was proactive and active in searching for appropriate daycare options for her child, as well as educational resources for both herself and her child. All participants mentioned that the Chinese education system, especially with giving too much homework, was not suitable for their children. However, none of the participants mentioned or seemed to be aware that children might be negatively impacted by high parental expectations of education. Moreover, even though education is highly valued in Chinese culture, individuals may prioritize other different aspects of their lives based on personal circumstances and values. For instance, this research found that participants Alicia and Catherine prioritized family over their personal educational achievements.

Although all four participants mentioned that they immigrated to Canada for better educational opportunities for their children, no previous research has explored whether Chinese immigrants come to Canada primarily for better education. Another significant finding was when participants commented about their concerns on the excessive use of homework in China and the resultant educational pressure that is being placed on students. In contrast, the participants noted that they liked the education system in Canada better. Many other research studies have noted the impact of excessive homework and pressure on students in the Chinese education system. For example, Zhao et al. (2015) found that the Chinese education system has been criticized for generating toxic levels of stress and producing graduates with high scores but low ability and poor health. However, the Chinese government is making



efforts to address this issue, such as the passing of an education law aimed at reducing excessive homework and after-school tutoring (BBC News, 2021; Daily News, 2021). The pressure for high academic achievement in China is influenced by cultural and social factors, and education has played a central role in Chinese society (Lin & Chen, 1995). However, Lin and Chen (1995) highlighted the significance of maintaining a balance between educational goals and other dimensions of students' lives. This finding is relevant to my research finding that some participants hesitated to pursue formal education due to concerns about balancing full-time studies and family responsibilities. The data showed that my participants prioritized family duties over pursuing education.

In conclusion, this research has added to the existing body of knowledge on the importance of an individual's inner strengths in shaping their experiences and the high value that Chinese immigrants place on education. However, this study has also revealed that valuing education does not necessarily mean prioritizing it above all other things. Participants in this study placed great value on their families and also on effectively balancing multiple priorities. Additionally, while participants maintained the value of education in their children, they may not have been fully aware of the potential academic stress caused by high parental expectations.

### ***Strategies***

This research confirmed existing knowledge specific to strategies utilized by adult Chinese immigrants in response to the third sub-question, "What strategies do participants use to deal with transitions?" In this research, the participants are middle-class and well-educated immigrants who attended the LINC program, demonstrating their desire and efforts to improve their English skills. This finding aligns with my literature review, which shows that adult Chinese immigrants aged 20-65, particularly those from the middle class with a strong educational background, are more motivated to invest in education (Adamuti-Trache et al., 2018; Hsiao, 2016; Wong, 2008; Zhang, 2022).

The participants employed various strategies to make their language learning experience more enjoyable. Participants found how to learn English in an entertaining way, such as watching dramas and listening to the radio to enhance their English language proficiency during their leisure time. Furthermore, some participants actively engaged in community events to practice their spoken English. These strategies were consistent with or adding new knowledge of previous literature investigating this topic (Li et al., 2018; Wang & Christiansen, 2019; Zhang, 2022). For example, Zhang's (2022) study highlighted the value of language classes, language exchange programs, and social activities with native speakers. Similarly, Wang and Christiansen (2019) discovered that older Chinese immigrants utilized free and popular English learning mobile apps, such as Duolingo or Hello English, for self-directed language learning. Li et al. (2018) also found that participating in community-based programs designed to meet the needs of older Chinese immigrants effectively promoted their well-being and reduced the impact of facing challenges.

Furthermore, in this research, it was found that participants' inner strengths served as strategies to effectively deal with transitions. This finding is consistent with a study conducted by Li et al. (2018) on older Chinese immigrants. The authors identified various resilience factors that aided in coping with challenges. These factors encompassed maintaining a positive attitude, engaging in social activities, and seeking support from religious or spiritual groups. Most participants in my study displayed positive attitudes when confronted with transitions and actively sought opportunities to learn English.

In summary, my research findings offered significant contributions to understanding the strategies employed by adult Chinese immigrants to cope with transitions and enhance their English language proficiency. The study highlighted the significance of harnessing inner strengths to cope with transitions and adopting diverse strategies to learn English. Additionally, the research revealed the value of learning English through entertaining means.

## *Supports*

The discussion in this section is in response to the fourth sub-question, “What external supports and resources do participants identify when navigating these transitions?” Previous research on the support received by adult Chinese immigrants has primarily focused on older adults (i.e., aged 65 or older) in Canada (Brotman et al., 2020; Hsiao, 2014, 2016, 2018; Liou & Shenk, 2016). For example, Brotman et al. (2020) highlighted the challenges faced by older immigrants in building and maintaining community relationships, emphasizing the importance of inclusive communities and social engagement. Similarly, Liou and Shenk (2016) explored the social support experiences of older Chinese immigrants in a church community in the United States, suggesting ways to support immigrants, including providing social activities, promoting English language learning, and creating inclusive communities with opportunities for social interaction. Similarly, this study revealed that participants received support from various sources in dealing with their transitions.

However, there appears to be limited research on the support other age groups of Chinese immigrants receive in coping with transitions. To fill this gap, my research provides specific insights into the support that adult Chinese immigrants of middle age (i.e., aged 32 to 43) received in dealing with transitions. The findings suggest the importance of support from various external sources, such as the government, institutions, and community, as well as from family members, especially spouses, in supporting family duties so that participants could participate in full-time LINC programs. Effective and adequate support can help participants deal with transitions and overcome challenges.

In summary, previous research emphasizes the importance of social and institutional support in promoting the successful settlement and integration of older Chinese immigrants in Canada. This study also confirmed the importance of such social and institutional support for middle-aged Chinese immigrants to Canada, although my study sample was small. This study also contributes to the existing

literature by providing insights into the specific support received by adult Chinese immigrants in coping with transitions, highlighting the need for continued support for immigrants of all ages.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

This study offers a holistic understanding of adult Chinese immigrants' experiences of dealing with transitions under the 4S System of transition theory. Through discussion of the research findings, this study offers valuable recommendations for adult Chinese immigrants, as well as immigrants from other countries facing similar experiences. Additionally, teaching professionals who work with this specific group of learners and policymakers responsible for supporting their needs can benefit from these recommendations. The research findings contribute to the practical guidance provided for these different stakeholders.

#### ***For Adult Chinese Immigrants***

The recommendations provided for adult Chinese immigrants encompass two main areas: internal factors and external supports and resources. Given the geographic transition from one country to another, immigrants often encounter multiple other transitions. Managing these transitions can be challenging; thus, it is crucial for immigrants to utilize their inner strengths, such as maintaining optimism, engaging in physical exercises, and adopting positive perspectives to cope with these transitions. Immigrants can intentionally train and develop positive perspectives as an internal strategy to effectively cope with transitions.

Moreover, maintaining the value of education and planning for their own and their children's education is a positive perspective in dealing with transitions. However, Chinese immigrants should also be mindful of the potential stressors that come with high parental expectations. One way to prevent these stressors is by engaging in ongoing dialogical conversations with their children (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

In addition to internal factors, immigrants are advised to actively seek external resources and support to assist them in dealing with transitions. These external resources comprise diverse types of support, including aid from family members, the local community, government-funded programs, and friends. Based on the findings, I suggest immigrants proactively seek external support, such as engaging in community activities and participating in events that enhance their English language proficiency. I also suggest that immigrants develop practical plans to balance work, family responsibilities, and their pursuit of education. Collaboration with family members, particularly spouses, is emphasized as it fosters a supportive environment that facilitates the successful management of transitions.

### ***For Instructors***

Educators are provided with recommendations in two key areas to support adult Chinese immigrants: getting to know their students and implementing effective teaching strategies. First, connecting with students by getting to know them is crucial. Teachers can tailor their teaching approach and support students' diverse learning needs by understanding their backgrounds, experiences, and unique challenges. Specifically, educators can utilize the 4S System of transition theory to gain holistic insights into immigrants' lived experiences. This systematic approach will allow educators to assess the support system surrounding the students and identify areas where additional support may be required.

Secondly, educators can employ effective teaching strategies that are particularly beneficial for adult Chinese immigrants. These strategies include designing targeted activities to enhance listening and speaking skills, implementing the flipped classroom model, using flexible assessment methods, and creating a supportive and welcoming learning environment.

To address the language proficiency needs of adult Chinese immigrants, it is crucial to prioritize the development of their listening and speaking skills. As identified by all participants in the study, these areas require improvement. Designing and implementing activities that specifically target listening and

speaking can be highly effective in addressing this need. These activities should be interactive, engaging, and provide ample opportunities for practice and application of language skills.

Implementing a flipped classroom model (Låg & Sæle, 2019) can further support the learning process for adult Chinese immigrants. The flipped classroom reverses the traditional teaching format, allowing students to access recorded lectures or learning resources outside of class and to utilize classroom hours for interactive activities and discussions with the teacher. This approach offers flexibility and enables students to balance their academic commitments with their personal lives. Flexibility in assessment methods is also crucial to accommodating the diverse learning goals and challenges of adult Chinese immigrants. Allowing students to challenge themselves and follow their own learning goals can foster motivation and a sense of ownership in their educational journey. In addition to improving immigrants' language skills, providing instruction in employment-related skills can be highly beneficial for adult Chinese immigrants. This includes guidance on job search strategies, resume writing, interview skills, and workplace communication, equipping them with the necessary tools for successful employment integration. Lastly, creating a welcoming and supportive learning environment is paramount. Immigrants face cultural and social adaptations, and a supportive atmosphere can help ease their transition and promote a sense of belonging within the educational setting.

### ***For Policymakers***

I suggest policymakers consider the following recommendations to better support adult Chinese immigrants in their language learning and transition process:

Firstly, policymakers can develop plans to create opportunities for hiring qualified immigrants as teachers in the LINC program. This means that teaching opportunities should be offered to Chinese immigrants who are professionally trained in English language skills. By recruiting instructors who have personally experienced the process of learning English as immigrants, a deeper understanding of

immigrants' specific learning needs can be achieved. For example, participant Jam highlighted the significant focus on developing reading and writing abilities among adult Chinese immigrants, which was not an effective way to learn English. Employing Chinese immigrants as instructors who can effectively share their experiences will provide invaluable insights and support to their students. This approach ensures a more comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges faced by this group.

Secondly, policymakers should continue to provide funding for community programs and initiatives that support adult Chinese immigrants in their transition and English learning process. This funding can help create language training programs that are flexible and accommodating. By designing programs that can be adapted to individual needs and schedules, immigrants can have access to quality language training that suits their specific circumstances.

Lastly, policymakers can focus on developing policies that promote the recognition of immigrants' educational and professional experiences acquired outside of Canada. This can be achieved by encouraging employers to recognize and value the skills and expertise that immigrant workers bring. Policymakers can also incentivize employers to provide language and employment-related training for immigrant employees. By investing in language training programs, employers can enhance employment opportunities for immigrants. This support not only benefits individuals by improving their job prospects but also facilitates the overall integration and prosperity of adult Chinese immigrants in Canada's workforce.

### ***Summary***

In this session, I provided practical recommendations to various stakeholders on enhancing support for adult Chinese immigrants living in Canada. It is suggested that immigrants use internal strengths while actively seeking external support to deal with transitions. With more effective teaching practices, instructors can also provide meaningful support to this group of learners. Likewise,

policymakers can play a crucial role in facilitating the success and integration of adult Chinese immigrants, leading to positive outcomes for both individuals, the local communities, and Canada as a whole.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In addition to the research limitations mentioned in Chapter One, the research sampling has limitations. In this study, all participants received higher education and had professional work experiences in China. Their experiences may differ from other Chinese immigrants who do not share similar backgrounds or experiences. Thus, future studies may focus on immigrants with less education. Moreover, all four participants were female. As reported by participants, only a small number of adult male Chinese immigrants were enrolled in the LINC program at the institution. Consequently, no male adult Chinese immigrants participated in this research. Societal expectations may lead to differences in experiences between male and female Chinese immigrants. Therefore, future studies may focus on male adult Chinese immigrants to compensate for the limitations of this research.

I also recommend conducting further research to explore how adult Chinese immigrants learn English, particularly whether they adopt a more logical or intuitive approach. The findings of the study revealed a crucial need for providing support to participants to enhance their speaking and listening skills. However, an important aspect that was not addressed in the study is that immigrants tend to learn English primarily through logical means rather than institutional methods. According to Eide (2012), the process of English language acquisition varies among students. Some students acquire English through logical thinking, while others rely on a more intuitive approach. Based on my personal English language learning experiences, my assumption is that adult Chinese immigrants learn English more through a logical approach rather than through intuition. It would be beneficial for research to delve further into



this topic. Such investigation could potentially offer valuable insights into devising more efficient teaching approaches specifically tailored for this demographic.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented a comprehensive discussion regarding the key findings of the research and its contribution and uniqueness to the existing knowledge in the field. I offered practical recommendations to adult Chinese immigrants and immigrants with similar transition experiences as my participants, instructors who teach this demographic, and policymakers. Lastly, I provided recommendations for future research.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

### **Are You Interested in Participating in this Study?**

#### *Exploring Adult Chinese Immigrants' English Language Learning Experiences in Canada*

##### **OVERVIEW:**

This study will explore strategies adult Chinese immigrants have used and the supports they have received on their English learning journey.

##### **WHAT IS INVOLVED?**

- One face-to-face interview, 30 to 45 minutes, focusing on sharing your experiences of English language learning.
- A second interview may be requested for further information.

##### **ETHICS STATEMENT:**

Participation is voluntary, and your answers will be completely confidential.

This study has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculty Research Ethics Board (Ethics ID: REB 22-1351).

Supervisor: Dr. Colleen Kawalilak, email: ckawalil@ucalgary.ca

If you are interested in participating in the interview, or have any questions, please contact the researcher:

Jinping Pang  
E-mail: jinping.pang@ucalgary.ca



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## Appendix B: Research Consent Form




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**Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:**

**Jinping Pang**, Faculty of Education, Werklund School of Education, Adult Learning, telephone: 587 430 1098, email: [jinping.pang@ucalgary.ca](mailto:jinping.pang@ucalgary.ca)

**Supervisor:** Colleen Kawalilak, Faculty of Education, Werklund School of Education, Adult Learning, email: [ckawalil@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ckawalil@ucalgary.ca)

**Title of Project:** English learning experiences of adult Chinese immigrants

**Ethics ID:** REB 22-1351

**Sponsor:** -

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study. Participation is completely voluntary and confidential.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore adult Chinese immigrants' English learning experiences in English language training programs after moving from China to Canada within the last five years.

Leaving China to live in a new country is a challenging transitional experience; most adult Chinese immigrants prefer to attend English language training programs to adapt to new living environments. This research aims to explore and describe what strategies and support participants have utilized to deal with transitions while attending English language training programs.

### **What Will I Be Asked to Do?**

You as participants will be engaged in semi-structured interviews to share your English language learning experiences. The first interview, about one hour, will collect your background information and allow you to share your English language learning experiences after transitioning from China to Canada within the last five years. If needed, a second interview will ask you to reflect further on the significance of your experiences. Within two weeks of your interview, if you wish to offer any more information, or you wish to discuss your experiences more in a follow-up interview of 15-20 minutes, you are free to contact me through the contact details at the beginning of this form to meet the researcher in person or online.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate altogether, you may refuse to participate in part of the study, you may decline to answer any, and all questions, and you may withdraw from the interviews at any time without penalty or loss of any imaginable benefits.

### **What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?**

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your demographic information and your immigration history. The demographic information will include your age, ethnicity, gender, and city or state of residence. The information about your immigration history will include when you moved to Canada and who you immigrated with. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to this information, and it will be kept strictly confidential. Audiotapes will also only be accessed by the researcher and supervisor but will never be shown in public. Any quotes that are used will not be connected to the participant by name but will be completely anonymous.

There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some, or none of them. Please review each of these options and choose Yes or No:

I grant permission to be audio-taped: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_  
 I wish to remain anonymous: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_  
 I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_  
 The pseudonym I choose for myself is: \_\_\_\_\_  
 You may quote me and use my name: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_

### **Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?**

There is no foreseeable risk, harm, or inconvenience to you the participant during this session. However, if sharing your experiences or perceptions triggers you or makes you uncomfortable in any way it is recommended that you contact the Student Wellness services at the University of Calgary, 2500 University Drive NW, MSC 370, Calgary, AB T2N 1N4, telephone (403) 210-9355. These services are available from 9:00-4:30 on weekdays and they are free of charge for full-time students. You can also



reach out to the Distress Centre. Details about how to access their services are available on their website <https://www.distresscentre.com/>

No payment will be made for participation in this study. Participants may request an individual follow up session of 15-20 minutes with the researcher to discuss any other concerns regarding your participation in this research. The participants will incur no costs, you are only asked to offer your time.

### **What Happens to the Information I Provide?**

The information you provide will only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisor. No one except the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the interview tape. After interviews and discussions have been transcribed and a summary has been made of information collected from surveys, pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. The original documents will be protected by the researcher and her supervisor. The anonymous data will be stored for five years on the researcher's computer disk, phone, or iPad, and it will be encrypted as well as password protected. After five years, the anonymous data will be erased from the device. It will not be available online at any time.

As a participant, you can request to have your data removed two weeks after the interview. After this time, withdrawal is no longer possible as information from participants will be interrelated and so it may be impossible to separate it from what others say. If you do decide to withdraw before this point, your information will be destroyed.

Are you interested in being contacted about a follow-up interview, with the understanding that you can always decline the request? Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_

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### **Signatures**

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: Jinping Pang

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Questions/Concerns**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

**Jinping Pang**, Faculty of Education, Werklund School of Education, Adult Learning, email: Werklund School of Education, email: [jinping.pang@ucalgary.ca](mailto:jinping.pang@ucalgary.ca)

**Supervisor:** Colleen Kawalilak, Faculty of Education, Werklund School of Education, Adult Learning, email: [ckawalil@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ckawalil@ucalgary.ca)

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at 403.220.6289 or 403.220.8640; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

### **Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Questions**

Semi-structured questions to guide the interview (these questions were used as a framework for the interview).

#### **Preamble:**

As a Chinese immigrant in Canada, I have faced challenges throughout my English learning experiences, which have motivated me to investigate other adult Chinese immigrants' English learning experiences. This study will explore strategies adult Chinese immigrants, such as you as my participant, have used and the supports you have received on your English learning journey.

#### **Participants' demographics:**

- What is your mother language?
- How long have you been in Canada?
- What are your educational and/or work experiences?
- How old are you?
- Have you learned English in China? What is your English level before attending this English language training program?
- The data collection about your immigration histories will include when you moved to Canada and who you immigrated with.
- Have you attended any English training programs in Canada? Where is it? How long is your program?

#### **Situations**

- What is your situation when you move from China to Canada? For example, do you move to Canada with your family?

- What is your situation is while attending an English learning program? For example, do you get support from family members or others?
- What are these transitions that have significant impact on you? For example, moving from China to Canada is considered as a transition.
- What are your perspectives on these transitions?
- Are those transitions/changes occurring on or off time according to your social clock? Let me explain to you some details about the social clock. Have you ever felt as though there was something you were supposed to have done by a certain age? For example, when all your friends are getting married, starting families, or finding employment, do you feel you have to do so as well? There seems to be an unspoken pressure to carry out these actions even though no one has explicitly stated that you must. Let us turn back to this research, if you move to Canada in your 20s, your adapting mechanisms will be different from if you move to Canada in your 40s. Now, what your thoughts are on this question?
- What components contributed to your ability to control the transition? Or do you feel a loss of control over the transition?
- Have you observed any changes in your role? For example, have you evaluated whether you would lose or gain from the transition? Are these changes temporary, permanent, or unknown to you?
- What impact does prior similar experience have on the current transition?
- What are the causes of stress or any unpleasant feelings?
- Who else you are responsible for might be affected by the transition?

**Self:**

What are your potential inner strengths for dealing with the situation/transition?

What has influenced your transformation (i.e., role changes) in terms of your physical, biological, mental, and emotional states?

**Support:**

What supports have you received to handle transitions? For example, family relationships, a network of friends, institutions, and communities where you work, or other institutional activities are all sources of support.

Are you experiencing more stress than support, or vice versa?

**Strategies:**

What strategies have you used to learn English during these transitions? What strategies have you noticed the instructor(s) have used to support your learning?

What different ways have you used to handle the transition? Change your previous methods of doing and thinking, for example.