

2016

# Challenges Facing First Year Chinese International Students In a California Private School

Shelby Bumgarner  
*Dominican University of California*

**Survey: Let us know how this paper benefits you.**

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.dominican.edu/masters-theses>

 Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Bumgarner, Shelby, "Challenges Facing First Year Chinese International Students In a California Private School" (2016). *Graduate Master's Theses, Capstones, and Culminating Projects*. 253.  
<https://scholar.dominican.edu/masters-theses/253>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Dominican Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Master's Theses, Capstones, and Culminating Projects by an authorized administrator of Dominican Scholar. For more information, please contact [michael.pujals@dominican.edu](mailto:michael.pujals@dominican.edu).

Challenges Facing First Year Chinese International Students  
In a California Private School

Shelby Bumgarner

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

August, 2016

Dominican University of California  
School of Education & Counseling Psychology  
Master of Science in Education  
San Rafael, CA  
August, 2016

**Signature Sheet**

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the coordinator of the Dominican University of California Master of Science in Education program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education and Counseling Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Shelby Bumgarner  
Candidate

Elizabeth Truesdell, Ph.D.  
Department Chair

Suresh Appavoo, Ed.D.  
Thesis Advisor

Jennifer Lucko, Ph.D.  
Second Reader

Copyright 2016 by Shelby Bumgarner.  
All rights reserved.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Suresh Appavoo, Dr. Kristin Tavernetti, and Dr. Jennifer Lucko for their generous support and assistance as I worked through the various stages of this thesis in the past year. Their encouragement helped me see that completing a master's thesis while teaching full-time really *is* possible! Thank you all for helping me achieve my educational goals so that I can better serve international students and the teachers who teach them. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Elizabeth Truesdell for her guidance throughout my experience at Dominican University.

I would like to thank the administration, faculty, and first-year Chinese international students and their guardians at the suburban California private school where I currently teach and where this research was conducted. Without their support and cooperation, this research study would not have been possible. A big thank you to Tony Shen and Catherine Zhang for their help in translating the international student assent form into Mandarin and to Catherine Zhang, my Mandarin/English translator, for the tireless hours you spent by my side as I interviewed nine Chinese secondary students to collect data for this project. I appreciate you tremendously! In addition, I would like to thank my dear friends and colleagues, Dr. David Gross and Miss Karissa Suwulka, and my dear friends and former colleagues, Mrs. Kristin Pacifico and Mrs. Kike Gipson, for cheering me on throughout the past year – your encouragement meant a lot to me.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Ed, and my sons, Dwight and Dietrich, who have faithfully stood by me and supported me during the year-long process of researching and writing this thesis. Thank you for your continued love and support in all of my endeavors!

**Table of Contents**

<b>Title Page</b> .....	1
<b>Signature Page</b> .....	2
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	4
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	5
<b>Abstract</b> .....	7
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	8
Definition of Terms .....	8
Statement of Problem .....	14
Research Question .....	14
Purpose Statement .....	14
Theoretical Rationale .....	15
Theory of Communitive and Academic Language .....	15
Theory of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency .....	15
Theory of Positive-Affective Filter .....	16
Zone of Proximal Development Theory .....	16
Assumptions .....	18
Background and Need .....	18
Summary .....	20
<b>Chapter 2: Review of the Literature</b> .....	21
Introduction .....	21
Historical Context .....	21
Increasing Enrollment of Chinese International Secondary Students .....	22
California Private Secondary Schools .....	24
Review of Academic Research .....	25
Challenges Facing ELL's in U.S. Public Secondary Schools .....	25
Challenges Facing International Students in U.S. Private Schools .....	32
Quality Education for Secondary ELL's in the U.S. ....	34
Summary .....	36
<b>Chapter 3: Methods</b> .....	38
Research Approach .....	38
Background of the Researcher .....	39
Research Site .....	41
Participants .....	41
Access and Permissions .....	43
Ethical Considerations .....	44
Interview Questions .....	46
Data Analysis Approach .....	47
Data Validity and Reliability .....	48
Member Checking .....	48

Using Description to Convey the Findings .....	49
Clarification of Researcher Bias .....	49
Reporting the Findings .....	49
<b>Chapter 4: Findings, Discussion, and Analysis .....</b>	<b>51</b>
Results .....	50
Discussion and Analysis of the Findings .....	60
Summary of Major Findings .....	70
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>71</b>
Recommendations .....	72
Limitations/Gaps in the Research .....	74
Implications for Further Research .....	75
Overall Significance of the Study .....	76
<b>References .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>84</b>
Appendix A: Principal Consent Form .....	84
Appendix B: Translator Confidentiality Agreement .....	85
Appendix C: Legal Guardian Consent Form .....	86
Appendix D: Student Assent Form .....	87
Appendix E: IRBPHS Approval Letter .....	88

### **Abstract**

Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese secondary students enrolled in grades nine through twelve make up almost 50% of America's international student population (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2015). According to the literature, these students face unique challenges in their education: learning core subjects in a non-native language before they have fully grasped the language, and sitting in classes that are taught by teachers with virtually no training in making the content comprehensible for international students. The purpose of this qualitative study is to acquire an in-depth understanding of the challenges that Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese, international secondary students face in their learning during their first year at one suburban California private school which established an international student program in 2007. The researcher conducted personal interviews with nine Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese international secondary students in grades seven through 11 who were in their first year attending this private school. Each participant answered 20 questions regarding the perceived challenges they face on a daily basis in this school as they attend mainstream classes with their native English speaking peers. The findings showed that the participants faced challenges in understanding the teacher in mainstream classes, learning difficult content in mainstream classes while still learning English, adjusting to a different educational system and culture, and making friends with the American students at school.



## Chapter 1: Introduction

According to the United States Immigration & Customs Enforcement Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) By the Numbers General Summary Quarterly Review (2015), the largest group of international secondary students [grades 6-12] who come to the U.S. to study each year are native Mandarin speakers from mainland China. Therefore, it is important for teachers and schools to understand the unique challenges that this particular group of international students face in their learning, as well as how the processes of language-acquisition work in order to create a successful educational model for educating these students.

International students in the United States face many challenges in education. One of these challenges is having to learn core subject areas in English before they have fully grasped the language. Another challenge is having to sit in classes that are taught by teachers who have little to no training for how to make the content comprehensible for international students. Multiple research studies have been conducted on the challenges English Language Learners (ELL's) face in U.S. public secondary schools (Clair, 1995; Harklau, 1994; Ingerson, 2011; Miller & Endo, 2003; Reeves, 2006; Youngs & Youngs, Jr., 2001). However, very few studies have examined the challenges international students face in U.S. private secondary schools (Farrugia, 2014; Lu & Jackson, 2012; Yin, 2013).

### Definition of Terms

**International students.** International students are defined as those who come to the U.S. to study on a student F-1 visa (usually without their families) and are a distinct population separate from the ELL population. Some international students hold Exchange Student J visas and are enrolled either at public schools or private schools for one semester or one school year. According to Yin (2013),

The international students enrolled in private secondary and primary schools are different from those enrolled in K-12 public schools that qualify for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services. Those enrolled in private and/or Christian schools come to the States alone during their teenage years at their own expense, whereas those who are eligible for ESOL services in K-12 public schools come to the States with parents or relatives and might have been in the United States school system since kindergarten. (p. 140)

**Secondary students.** Students who are generally between the ages of 11 and 18, who are enrolled in a secondary school which in the U.S., generally consists of grades 6-12.

**English Language Learner (ELL).** English language learners (ELL's) are defined by the U.S. Department of Education website (2015) as "national-origin-minority students who are Limited English Proficient (LEP). The ELL term is often preferred over LEP as it highlights accomplishments rather than deficits" (<http://www2ed.gov>). As a group, ELL's represent one of the fastest-growing groups among the school-aged population in this nation" (Francis, M. Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & H. Rivera, 2006, p. 3). ELL's are students who are immigrants, or potential immigrants, to the U.S. with their families and are a distinct population separate from the international student population. ELL's enter school proficient in a language other than English, and the focus of the term, ELL, is on learning English to succeed in school (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p. 274).

**Limited English Proficient (LEP).** This label is an official designation of the U.S. government for ELL students who are considered to lack enough proficiency in English to participate in mainstream classrooms:

When ELL's have gained the proficiency in the English language needed to participate in grade-level classes, they lose their LEP designation, are required to participate in the mainstream classroom without specialized support, and are no longer included in percent proficient calculations for the LEP subpopulation of a school. (Francis, M. et al., 2006, pp. 3-4)

**English as a Second Language (ESL).** This term applies to courses or methods designed to teach English to students who are native speakers of languages other than English and who are learning English in a school or other setting where English is used by the majority of the speakers in the country. The term, ESL is sometimes used interchangeably with the term, ELL, to refer to the student who is learning English as a Second Language.

**English as a Foreign Language (EFL).** This term applies to courses or methods designed to teach English to students living abroad, where English is not the language used by the majority of the speakers in the country where students are learning English. The term, EFL is sometimes used interchangeably with the term, ESL, to refer to teaching English to students whose first language is not English.

**English Language Development (ELD).** This term refers to a specialized program of English language instruction appropriate for ELL students, and is usually more prevalent in public schools than private schools. ELD programs are “. . . designed and implemented to promote English learners’ English proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. ELD instruction is based on the state English Language Development Standards” (CSET Test Guide: English Language Development General Examination Information, 2013, p. 6).

**English Language Development (ELD) Standards.** The first ELD Standards for the state of California were developed in 1999 and were the basis for the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), the English language proficiency test used in California public schools for students who speak a first language other than English. In November, 2012, new ELD standards were adopted that align to the California Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts (CSET Test Guide: English Language Development General Examination Information, 2013, p. 6).

**ELL inclusion in mainstream classroom.** The term, “mainstream classroom,” refers to a regular, content-area classroom in which the majority of students learn on an average school day. ELL inclusion in mainstream classrooms, or the decision to place ELL students in regular classrooms in schools for part or all of the school day, is a topic currently under debate in both public and private schools.

Research shows that ELL students create some significant challenges for mainstream teachers (Miller & Endo, 2003; Reeves, 2006; Youngs, & Youngs, Jr., 2001). While current California teacher credential programs require pre-service teachers to take classes in multicultural education and methods for teaching ELLs in mainstream classes, “. . . some teachers view subject-related content mastery and second-language development as separate processes, with the latter seen as the responsibility of ESL-specialist teachers” (Milnes & Cheng, 2008).

**Academic language.** This refers to vocabulary and concepts that are used across all content area classes (e.g. Social Studies, Math, Science, English Language Arts) which students need to acquire in order to participate successfully in mainstream schooling. Some examples of academic language are the words: *explain, respond, summarize, distinguish, compare, contrast,* and *analyze*. According to Faltis and Wolfe:

This meaning of academic language stems from Jim Cummins’ (1981) theoretical distinction between everyday and school-based language. Cummins presented academic language as CALP, cognitive academic language proficiency. He likened CALP to language and cognitive activities underlying the development of high-level literacy skills in any language. Cummins claimed that students who achieve the ability to complete cognitively demanding tasks without the help of contextual clues have CALP. Moreover, he and others who support this claim argue that it takes anywhere from 4 to 7 years to develop CALP in a second language, namely, English. (1999, p. 273)

**Scaffolding.** This term was first used by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) in their study of parent-child talk in early childhood (Gibbons, 2002, p. 10). In the construction of a house or building, scaffolding is a temporary structure that is put up during the process of construction, and taken down bit by bit as the new building goes up. Though scaffolding is temporary, it is essential for the successful construction of the building. It can be described as “the temporary assistance by which a teacher helps a learner know how to do something, so that the learner will later be able to complete a similar task alone” (Gibbons, 2002, p. 10). Some examples of scaffolding for ELL students include: the use of graphic organizers during or after a lesson; pre-teaching key vocabulary before reading a story; and using visuals such as Powerpoint, pictures, posters, or realia while teaching a lesson.

**Sheltered content classes.** This is an instructional model designed for secondary schools with large populations of ELL students, and was first introduced by Stephen Krashen (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p. 277). This approach consists of three main tenets: “. . . input to students must be comprehensible; the focus is on academic content, not language per se; and only students who are becoming bilingual, and with at least intermediate ESL proficiency, should be in the classes” (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p. 277). In sheltered content classes, teachers modify their lessons by using various types of scaffolding to facilitate ELL students’ understanding and class participation. Thus, ELL students learn academic subjects such as history, math, science, and English literature without having to compete with native English speakers; hence, the idea of being ‘sheltered.’

**Culturally responsive teaching (CRT).** This term refers to teaching that is characterized by “valuing students’ resources and backgrounds while acknowledging that students need access

to the school's mainstream curriculum and system for school success" (Peercy, 2011). Villegas and Lucas (2002) asserted that:

. . . culturally responsive teachers are socioculturally conscious, have affirming views of diverse students, see themselves as responsible for and capable of changing schools to make them more equitable, understand how learners construct knowledge and how to promote knowledge construction, know about the lives of their students, and design instruction that builds on what students already know while simultaneously stretching them beyond the familiar. (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, as cited in Peercy, 1999, p. 330)

**Dymally-Allatore Bilingual Services Act.** This act was signed into California state law in 1973 in order to eliminate language barriers that prevent people from having equal access to public services either because they do not speak or write English, or because their primary language is other than English. According to the State of California Department of Developmental Services website:

This Act mandates that State agencies directly involved in the furnishing of information or the rendering of services to the public must employ a sufficient number of qualified bilingual persons in public contact positions to ensure the provision of information and services to the public in the language of the non-English speaking people. (<http://www.dds.ca.gov/BilingualServices/>)

**Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.** This act protects people from discrimination based on race, color or national origin in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance. Title VI states that:

No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Agencies and institutions that receive ED funds covered by Title VI include: 50 state education agencies . . . 17,000 local education systems; 4,700 colleges and universities; 10,000 proprietary institutions; and other institutions, such as libraries and museums that receive ED funds. (<http://www.2ed.gov>)

**Statement of the Problem**

Only a relative handful of studies have specifically examined the educational experiences of international students in U.S. private secondary schools (Farrugia, 2014; Lu & Jackson, 2012; Yin, 2013). While many studies have been conducted on teacher attitudes and preparedness for teaching ELL students in public school classroom settings (e.g. Clair, 1995; Miller & Endo, 2003; Milnes & Cheng, 2008; Reeves, 2006; Youngs & Youngs, Jr., 2001), the literature seems to have a paucity of studies specific to Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese international secondary students in suburban private schools in the U.S. The scarcity of information available regarding the challenges that Mandarin-speaking, mainland Chinese international secondary students face in their first year attending suburban private schools in the U.S. is apparent and thus presents a useful opportunity for further research. Such studies would greatly benefit not only the large number of Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese international secondary students who are currently attending these schools, but also the teachers who find themselves teaching these students, as well as the school administrators who plan the school day/course offerings and special events for the international students in the school community.

**Research Question**

This study focused on one primary research question: What are the challenges facing Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese, international, secondary students in their first year of study at a suburban California private school?

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the challenges that Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese, international secondary students face in

their learning during their first year attending one suburban California private school which established an international student program in 2007. The intention of this study is to obtain information regarding the perceived challenges these Chinese international students face, from their own unique perspective, during their first year of study in one suburban California private school so that improvements can be made to this school's international student program in the future.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

#### **Theory of Communicative and Academic Language.**

Cummins (1981) defined language development as a continuum, beginning with basic conversational skills and continuing toward academic language proficiency. Communication at this level is context embedded and cognitively undemanding. People at this level can typically demonstrate simple greetings, information requests, brief descriptions, and expressions of feelings. According to Williams (2001), “. . . it usually takes a person between two and three years to develop proficiency in communicative language. Academic language is progressively more challenging on the continuum of language development; it is context reduced and cognitively demanding” (p. 751). People at this level of language development can typically demonstrate the skills of comparing, classifying, inferring, problem solving, and evaluating. It takes five to seven years to achieve academic language proficiency, and students' success in school depends on proficiency at this level (Collier, 1987, 1989; Collier & Thomas, 1989; Cummins, 1981; Krashen & Biber, 1988).

#### **Theory of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency.**

Cummins's cognitive approach to language (1979) emphasized the innate strengths every learner brings to the task of learning a second language. This approach is based on the



assumption that learners are not “empty vessels waiting to be filled,” but that learners come with considerable knowledge of the world (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006, p. 59). Cummins’s research holds that “being bilingual is a cognitive advantage” and that “knowledge of the first language provides a firm foundation for second-language acquisition” (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006, p. 59), thus helping teachers to recognize the depth and breadth of the resources that bilingual learners bring to the classroom and the importance of building on those resources while bilingual learners are acquiring English.

#### **Theory of Positive-Affective Filter.**

Krashen’s Affective Filter hypothesis (1982) addresses the emotional variables involved in second-language acquisition, including anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006, p. 59). Because these variables can block the language acquisition device (LAD), causing less comprehensible input to enter the learner’s LAD, it is crucial that a positive affective filter be maintained in order to increase the comprehensible input in a learner’s LAD (p. 59). “Most teachers understand that a nonthreatening and encouraging environment promotes learning, and that it is important to increase the enjoyment of learning, raise self-esteem, and blend self-awareness with an increase in proficiency as students learn English” (p. 59).

#### **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) Theory.**

Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) defined the educational basis for a child’s development to be enclosed in what he called “the zone of proximal development,” or the cognitive gap between what a child can do unaided and what a child can accomplish with the help of an adult, or skilled expert (Gibbons, 2002, p. 8). Such assisted performance “. . . leads learners to reach beyond what they are able to achieve alone, to participate in new situations and

to tackle new tasks, or in the case of second language learners, to learn new ways of using language” (p. 8).

Vygotsky’s theory resulted in the coining of the term, “scaffolding,” which was first used in an examination of parent-child talk during early childhood by Wood, Bruner, and Ross in 1976 (Gibbons, 2002, p. 10). Just as scaffolding is used on a construction site to provide temporary help for the workers constructing a building, and is taken down upon completion of the building, scaffolding in learning is described by Bruner as “the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some tasks so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring” (Bruner, 1978, p. 19). Scaffolding for ELL students refers to the temporary assistance a teacher can offer to help learners understand how to do something, so that later, the learner will be able to complete a similar task alone (Gibbons, 2002, p. 10).

These four foundational theories are relevant to this research study and the population of students being interviewed. Since this study examines the challenges of learning content knowledge via mainstream classes in English, as a second language, at a school outside the home country and culture, it follows that the basis of the challenges these students are facing could be rooted in the school’s understanding and application of these important foundational theories. This study utilizes Cummins’ *Theory of Communicative and Academic Language*, *Theory of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency*, Krashen’s *Theory of Positive-Affective Filter*, and Vygotsky’s *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) Theory* as the primary lenses through which (a) the twenty research questions used in the study were generated, (b) the perceived learning experiences of the participants were analyzed, and (c) recommendations for further research were identified. Based on these four theories, the following questions enabled the framework for this study:

- Are mainstream teachers aware of the various stages involved in second-language acquisition (e.g. basic conversational skills advancing to academic language proficiency)?
- Are mainstream teachers helping students to become proficient in academic language while learning in the content areas?
- Are mainstream teachers aware of the emotional variables involved in classrooms where second-language acquisition is taking place?
- Are mainstream teachers utilizing Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development*, allowing second-language learners to master new ways of using language?

### **Assumptions**

This research study assumed that Chinese international students who are in their first year of study at suburban California private schools face particular linguistic and cultural challenges in their learning. Secondly, this study assumed that the participants in this study will be able to openly divulge the challenges they face at this school in spite of the possibility that there may be other pressures which may influence what they elect to divulge.

### **Background and Need**

Very few research studies have specifically examined the needs of Mandarin-speaking mainland Chinese international students in U.S. private secondary schools while multiple research studies have been conducted on the challenges ELL's face in U.S. public secondary schools. In one recent study, Lee (2012) discovered that a network of New York City public high schools was found to have created a successful educational program for newcomer immigrant ELL's that is academically enriching, culturally responsive, and socially supportive. Thus, while it serves as an ideal model for other U.S. secondary schools, public or private, it may not be possible to fully replicate it in other parts of the U.S., due to the fact that the most successful

schools for newcomer ELL's are usually located in large, urban areas where many teachers may have more experience with such diverse learners. However, increasing numbers of ELL's are settling in small towns, suburbs, and rural communities in the U.S. that have little experience dealing with cultural, racial, or linguistic diversity and thus may not be able to emulate this model. Lee's study indicates that further research on this topic should include strategies on how to create successful models of education for ELL's in smaller districts and private schools in rural communities.

This research study, which identifies the challenges international students face in a private school located in a suburban community, is one attempt to respond to the need indicated by Lee's study.

In their book, *So Much to Say: Adolescents, Bilingualism, & ESL in the Secondary School*, Faltis & Wolfe said,

. . . language minority students are present in this country's secondary schools in increasing numbers, and there is nowhere near enough understanding of how these students experience school and how schools and teachers respond to their presence. Secondary education in the U.S. is in need of far-reaching structural change if it is to adequately meet its mandate to educate these students, and all students, on an equal basis. (1999, p. vii)

Other studies have discovered that there is a link between the attitudes faculty in a school have towards ELL students and the amount of adequate training this faculty feel they have received in order to teach them well. Ingerson (2011) conducted a study in one New York public high school that investigated current attitudes toward ELL students by faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as suggestions from one ELL student in the school regarding what would help him achieve success, identified in the study as passing grades in the mainstream classroom. As a result of her study, Ingerson found three recurring themes which shed light on the effect teachers' lack of training has on the ELL's who sit in their classes: (a) ELL's experience

difficulties in the classroom, (b) there are barriers which affect academic achievement for ELL's, and (c) there is work to be done to remove those barriers (pp. 21-23). Thus, research is warranted to look into the needs of Mandarin-speaking mainland Chinese international students in U.S. suburban private schools in order to determine what factors and experiences are necessary for them to achieve success in school since they are a distinctive part of this ELL population.

### **Summary**

International students and ELL's who are in their first year of study in U.S. private secondary schools face many challenges in their learning. Little research has been conducted on the experiences of international secondary students in U.S. private schools, while much research exists on the experiences of ELL's in U.S. public schools. The research shows that there is a need to create successful models of education for ELL's in smaller districts and private schools in rural and suburban communities. In addition, research shows that there is a link between the attitudes teachers in a school have towards ELL students and the amount of training these teachers feel they have received in order to teach them well. This phenomenon ultimately affects the ability of ELL students to learn and be successful in mainstream classes.

In an attempt to address these needs, this study investigates the challenges that Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese, international secondary students face in their learning during their first year attending a suburban private school in California which established an international student program in 2007.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction**

This section is an examination of the research literature on the challenges facing international students in U.S. private schools and ELL students in U.S. public secondary schools, as well as the existent models of quality secondary education for such students in the U.S. today. Information was gathered from print sources and academic library searches using online resources. Research information is organized into two categories as follows: Historical Context and Review of the Academic Research. Subheadings include: Increasing enrollment of Chinese international secondary students in the U.S.; California private secondary schools; Challenges facing ELL's in U.S. public secondary schools; Challenges facing international students in U.S. private schools; and Quality education for secondary ELL's in the U.S.

### **Historical Context**

The history of international secondary students going abroad to study in the U.S. can be traced back to the 1920's when the first youth exchange programs were started by European Rotary Clubs (Page, 2013). The majority of secondary students who study overseas have traditionally been those participating in exchange programs, spending only one or two semesters in the U.S. before returning to their countries of origin to complete their secondary education. During the mid-twentieth century, students from Europe and South America were the most likely candidates for such exchange programs in the U.S. (Farrugia, 2014).

According to Farrugia, “. . . much of the recent growth in secondary student mobility has been attributed to strong growth in international students enrolling for long-term study with the goal of earning a secondary school credential in the host country” (2014, p. 7). Growing economies and an expanding middle class in Asian countries has enabled more families to afford

sending their children abroad to the U.S. for a Western education. In addition, “Many Asian students enroll in secondary schools abroad as a pathway to future enrollment in the host country’s higher education system” (Farrugia, 2014, p. 7).

Currently, international students from Asia, particularly those from mainland China and South Korea, comprise the majority of the almost 49,000 international secondary students in the U.S. who are studying for a high school diploma (Farrugia, 2014, p. 3). Almost 50% of those students come from mainland China, according to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (SEVIS by the Numbers General Summary Quarterly Review, 2015).

Today, international secondary students study in all 50 states. “The geographic distribution of international students is related to the availability of international programs at secondary schools, as well as perceptions of prospective students and their families of desirable places to live” (Farrugia, 2014, p. 14). California is currently the largest host state of international secondary students, hosting 18% of the United States’ international student population overall (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2015).

### **Increasing enrollment of Chinese international secondary students in the U.S.**

Between 2005 to 2014, the number of mainland Chinese students attending American secondary institutions grew almost sixty-fold, from 632 to 38,089 (Winter, 2014, p. 25). Today, mainland Chinese secondary students enrolled in grades 9-12 make up almost 50% of America’s international secondary student population, according to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (SEVIS by the Numbers General Summary Quarterly Review, 2015). According to Winter, “Wealthy parents want to bypass the mainland’s [China’s] high-pressure education system and boost their children’s chances of getting into an American university” (2014, p. 26). Many also see the move to the U.S. as a ‘sound business investment,’ meaning the linguistic

skills and the network of international connections that their children will build while studying in the U.S. will guarantee the future success of their businesses in China (p. 26).

Another reason why some mainland Chinese parents choose to send their children to a U.S. private secondary school is due to low academic achievement in China, which will ultimately affect the student's prospects for high school, college, and a future career (Lu & Jackson, 2012, p. 1). According to Lu & Jackson,

Sarah, a school consultant in China, said she meets many students who come to the United States to take the easy way out and will 'bring problems from China to the United States. I see the movement growing in an alarming rate, and my biggest concern is quality control on both sides.' Parents often pay education agents thousands of dollars to send their kids to schools overseas, and some agents help students lie on their transcripts to get into American schools. (2012, p. 2)

Other mainland Chinese parents, whose students are excelling academically in China, choose to send their children to U.S. private secondary schools because of the extra time American students have to pursue sports, hobbies, and other interests outside school. According to Lu & Jackson,

Some students like Hua, 14, came to a California private school with top grades in her Chinese school. Her parents sent Hua to America because she could continue to excel academically and also have time for hobbies like painting and calligraphy. (2012, p. 2)

Some private schools in the U.S. view mainland Chinese students as a way to keep their school's enrollment intact, and often accept and enroll as many Chinese students as the school can hold since they are able to pay full tuition, often to the detriment of the English-language-immersion experience. A spokesperson from Burgeon Education, a Shanghai based agency which helps place Chinese secondary students at private schools in the U.S., commented, "Over the years we started to see Chinese students taking up 30%, in some cases even 70 to 80% of the



total population of some institutions” (Winter, 2014, p. 26). When this happens, Chinese students find it difficult to grow in their development of English language skills, and many transfer to other schools with smaller percentages of Chinese students and a more diverse student body. While the motivations for sending their children abroad to study at U.S. private schools may vary considerably among mainland Chinese parents, studying abroad, for mainland Chinese students, represents the opportunity to develop their academic knowledge, language, and intercultural competencies with time left over to pursue other interests, as well as increase their family’s status and future opportunities through increased earning potential. Therefore, studying abroad is highly valued in mainland Chinese society (Bodycott, 2012; Lu & Jackson, 2012; Romanowski, 2006; Winter, 2014; Yin, 2013).

#### **California private secondary schools.**

Currently, 95% of all international secondary students choose to enroll in U.S. private schools (Farrugia, 2014). According to Farrugia’s 2014 report, *Charting New Pathways to Higher Education: International Secondary Students in the United States*,

Current U.S. visa policies restrict F-1 students to no more than one year of study in public schools, which means that international students are not able to enroll in public high schools for multiple years to earn a high school diploma. Given these visa restrictions, international programs at public schools function more like exchange programs than those at private schools. (p. 4)

While the California Department of Education (CDE) is responsible for all students in California public schools, including Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, to be provided equal access to ELD (English Language Development) services and information in compliance with the Dymally-Allatorre Bilingual Services Act (1973) and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (State of California Department of Developmental Services, 2014),

. . . private schools function outside the jurisdiction of the California Department of Education (CDE) and most state regulations. Private schools do not participate in California's educational accountability system and are directly accountable to students and their parents or guardians, based on the terms of the private school enrollment contract. (California Department of Education, 2016)

Thus, California private schools have the right to determine what constitutes a quality education for the students they choose to enroll, including international students.

### **Review of the Academic Research**

Because California private schools are not accountable to the California Department of Education and most state regulations, and are not required to provide Limited English Proficient (LEP) students with English Language Development (ELD) services, it follows that programs for international students in private schools vary greatly from school to school. Moreover, programs for international students in private schools may or may not resemble programs for ELL's in public secondary schools. In this section, the author reviews the available academic research on the challenges facing both ELL students in U.S. public secondary schools and international students in U.S. private schools, as well as the existent models of quality secondary education for such students in the U.S. today.

#### **Challenges facing ELL's in U.S. public secondary schools.**

Harklau (1994) acknowledged the fact that adolescent ELL's in U.S. public high schools are likely to study in several different classroom settings with several different teachers on a daily basis, unlike ELL's in elementary school or college-level intensive English programs, who tend to stay in the same classroom with the same teacher for all of most of the day (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p. 42). Thus, ELL's in public secondary schools face the unique challenge of acquiring a second language while simultaneously learning content knowledge in predominantly mainstream classes. "Because of the compartmentalized nature of high school instruction, mainstream instruction itself is quite diverse, spanning different subject matter specializations,

different expectations for participation structures and literate behaviors, and different levels of academic expectations” (Harklau, 1994, as cited in Faltis & Wolfe, p. 42).

Harklau’s 1994 qualitative research study examined the second language learning experiences of adolescent ELL’s in both ESL and mainstream classes over a three-and-a-half year period at a suburban California public high school where LEP (Limited English Proficient) students made up less than 100 of the school’s 1,600 students (Faltis & Wolfe, p. 43). This public high school developed “an unintegrated ESL curriculum supplemental to an unaltered mainstream curriculum,” which Harklau described as being “not atypical in these settings” (p. 43). Through data collected in her observations of ELL students in both ESL and mainstream classes, interviews with ELL students and teachers regarding the language learning experiences of the ELL’s, and actual schoolwork collected by the researcher, Harklau reported some important findings and recommendations regarding the challenges ELL’s faced in one suburban California public high school:

- Teachers in secondary mainstream classes often do not make the content comprehensible for ELL students.

Because the majority of their audience is native-English speaking, teachers tend not to make the adjustments in input that they might if they were speaking exclusively with non-native speakers . . . As a result, a great deal of the teacher-generated input in mainstream classes was incomprehensible to learners and caused them considerable frustration. (Harklau, 1994, as cited in Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, pp. 44-45)

- Secondary ESL classes provided students with considerably more opportunities for spoken language output than mainstream classes.

Students agreed that they spoke the most in ESL . . . Rather than allowing the loudest or most persistent students to do most of the talking, as frequently happened in mainstream classes, Carson [the ESL teacher] called upon every student in her classes several times over the course of a class. Smaller class sizes

and students' greater comfort in speaking in front of fellow non-native speakers facilitated discussions. Unlike mainstream classes, where ESL students seemed cowed and rarely spoke, students in the ESL classes engaged in extended interactions about everything from how fax machines work to why Truman authorized the use of atom bombs. (Harklau, 1994, as cited in Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p. 46)

- Teachers in secondary mainstream classes often are not trained in meeting the special linguistic needs of second language learners.

. . . some [teachers] commented that they were uncertain how best to give non-native language writers feedback. Students' work showed that many teachers ignored errors completely. Others marked errors inconsistently. Mainstream teachers often assumed, incorrectly, that simply marking the word or putting a question mark next to it would be enough for students to edit such errors by ear. (Harklau, 1994, as cited in Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p. 49)

- ELL's perceived a social wall between themselves and their local, native English-speaking peers.

Many in the public as well as many educators in American public schools hold a folk belief that ESL students will learn English simply by surrounding them with native English-speaking peers. The underlying premise is that ESL students will inevitably interact with and learn from peers . . . so even though they were surrounded by native speakers most of the day, ESL students seldom found interactions with these peers easy or comfortable (Harklau, 1994, as cited in Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p. 50).

- The education of ELL's in public high schools is enhanced by the collaboration of ESL and mainstream teachers, with all teachers taking responsibility for students' linguistic and academic learning in their classrooms.

Coordination demands considerably more than a one-day workshop on teaching LEP students, however. It requires strong administrative support for recognizing and including language-minority students' perspectives in the life of the school and promoting ethnic and linguistic diversity. Administrators also need to provide appropriate ongoing training and support and, above all, time for ESL and mainstream educators to collaborate. Content-area teachers must be encouraged to develop realistic understandings of the purpose and scope of ESL

instruction. (Harklau, 1994, as cited in Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p. 56)

- Secondary ESL teachers in schools that are adjusting to increasing enrollment of ELL's need to ensure that their colleagues are educated about the nature of second language acquisition and about the legal and ethical rights of language-minority students.

Undertaken by those who operate under the folk belief that language-minority students will learn best when 'submersed' in mainstream classrooms without ESL or bilingual instructional support, restructuring efforts can erode the safeguards that ensure that special assistance is provided to language-minority students. (Harklau, 1994, as cited in Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p. 57)

There are several research studies which support the major findings of Harklau's 1994 study, namely: teachers in secondary mainstream classes often do not make the content comprehensible for ELL students, and teachers in secondary mainstream classes often are not trained in meeting the special linguistic needs of second language learners (Clair, 1995; Ingerson, 2011; Miller & Endo, 2003; Reeves, 2006; Youngs & Youngs, Jr., 2001).

In order to better understand mainstream classroom teachers' perspectives with regard to ELL students, Clair (1995) conducted a year-long qualitative research study to discover the beliefs, self-reported practices, and professional development needs of three mainstream classroom teachers (grades four, five, and 10) in three Massachusetts urban and suburban public schools who taught ELL students in addition to native English speakers in their mainstream classes. Clair found that the three mainstream teachers' beliefs about teaching ELL students suggests that "with inadequate teacher preparation and nonexistent or inappropriate professional development, these mainstream classroom teachers are learning to educate ELL students on the job" (p. 194). Clair's study concluded that it is common for mainstream teachers to lack both

understanding of second language acquisition and also the attitudes which facilitate ELL student achievement (p. 194).

In a similar study using narrative inquiry and a review of current research on LEP students, Miller & Endo (2003) investigated the origins of the challenges that LEP students face in U.S. public schools. They found that “Many mainstream classroom teachers are not trained in ESL and often have difficulty meeting the needs of their students” (p. 1). Miller & Endo’s study showed that there is an urgent need to prepare our teachers to welcome these [LEP] students into their classrooms. The researchers stated,

. . . these students face many challenges as they struggle to fit into a new society, a new language, and a new school. If our teachers are not prepared to deal with these students, they will continue to enter our schools and our society only to face undue hardship. (pp. 9-10)

Reeves’ (2006) study agrees with Harklau’s (1994) in that secondary ELL’s, especially those in schools with small ELL populations, typically spend the majority of the school day in mainstream classes and attend ESL classes for one or two periods (Reeves, 2006, p. 133). Both Harklau’s and Reeves’ studies show that teachers in those mainstream classrooms are largely untrained to work with ELL’s. Reeves’ (2006) study explored four categories within secondary teacher attitudes toward ELL inclusion: (a) ELL inclusion in mainstream classrooms, (b) coursework modification for ELLs, (c) professional development for working with ELL’s, and (d) perceptions of language and language learning.

Reeves (2006) conducted a survey of 279 high school subject-area teachers from a school district located in a midsized city in the southeastern United States. Seven hundred and sixty-two (1.5%) students were identified as LEP (Limited English Proficient). Two hundred and seventeen (77.8%) of the participants in this study reported that they had experienced ELL inclusion at some point in their teaching careers. Reeves found that a majority of participants, 252 (90.3%),

had received no training to work with ELL students. Four important findings emerged from this study:

1. A discrepancy exists between teachers' general attitudes toward ELL inclusion and their attitudes toward specific aspects of ELL inclusion.
2. Teachers expressed concern about the equitability of coursework modifications for ELL's.
3. Teachers demonstrated an ambivalence toward participating in professional development for working with ELL's.
4. Teachers are working under misconceptions about how second languages are learned. (Reeves, 2006, p. 137)

The author believes that the combination of a school faculty unprepared for teaching ELL's and a school policy of immediate mainstreaming for all ELL's, even those with low English proficiency, sets the stage for the frustration and failure of teachers and ELL students. Reeves' study shows the need for all secondary mainstream teachers to possess a basic understanding of second-language acquisition processes in order to successfully include and educate ELL's in secondary mainstream classrooms.

Ingerson (2011) conducted a study similar to Reeves' (2006) and discovered that there is a link between the attitudes faculty and administration in a school have towards ELL students and the amount of adequate training these school staff feel they've received in order to teach them well. Ingerson's study in one New York suburban public high school investigated current attitudes toward ELL students held by faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as suggestions from one ELL student in the school regarding what would help him achieve success, identified in the study as passing grades in the mainstream classroom. Ingerson found that all of the administrators who participated in the study felt the teachers in the school had not been provided with the "best" possible training/professional development on how to include ELLs in the classroom.

Of the teachers surveyed at the same school, 86.7% stated that they do not modify assignments or completely include their ELL students in their classrooms because they have not been provided with the necessary tools or training to do so (Ingerson, 2011, pp. 19-20). Ninety-one percent of these teachers said they would be somewhat to very interested in attending a professional development or in-service class that addressed the topic of inclusion of ELL's in the mainstream classroom (p. 20).

In Ingerson's interview of an 11<sup>th</sup> grade male student who immigrated to the U.S. from Puerto Rico, she found three recurring themes which shed light on the effect teachers' lack of training has on the ELL's who sit in their classes: "ELL's experience difficulties in the classroom, there are barriers which prevent academic achievement for ELL's, and there is work to be done to remove those barriers" (Ingerson, 2011, pp. 21-22). Ingerson concluded with two important implications from her research study at one New York suburban public high school: (a) administrators need to provide opportunities for professional development on teaching students of limited English proficiency, and (b) teachers need to make modest changes to accommodate ELL students in their classes (p. 25).

Youngs and Youngs, Jr. (2001) conducted a study similar to Clair (1995), Ingerson (2011), and Reeves (2006) in which they investigated the nature of secondary mainstream teachers' attitudes towards the ESL students in their mainstream classes and explored possible predictors of those attitudes. Youngs and Youngs Jr. surveyed 143 middle school mainstream teachers at two junior high schools and one middle school that had student populations of roughly 1,000 each in a community of 80,000 in the Great Plains region of the U.S. The authors developed a model of five predictors which they hypothesized would result in mainstream teachers' positive attitudes toward ESL students in their mainstream classes: (a) completion of



foreign language or multicultural education courses, (b) ESL training, (c) experience abroad, (d) work with diverse ESL students, and (e) gender (Youngs & Youngs Jr., 2001, p. 97). The findings of this study show that:

. . . mainstream teachers are more likely to have positive attitudes toward ESL students if they have had a foreign language course or a multicultural education course; work in the humanities, social sciences, or natural/physical sciences versus applied disciplines; have had at least some sort of ESL training; have lived outside the United States or taught outside the United States; have interacted with a culturally diverse population of ESL students; and are female. (Youngs & Youngs, Jr., 2001, p. 116)

These results suggest that Youngs' and Youngs Jr.'s five-predictor model could be replicated in other studies in order to better understand secondary mainstream teachers' attitudes toward ESL students in mainstream classrooms. The authors concluded that, "The more preservice and in-service teachers are exposed to diversity through foreign language courses, courses in multicultural education, ESL training, and work with culturally diverse ESL students, the more positive teachers are likely to be about working with ESL students" (Youngs & Youngs, Jr., 2001, p. 117).

### **Challenges facing international students in U.S. private schools.**

In her research study, Yin (2013) emphasized the fact that while most of the previous studies concerning K-12 ELLs have centered on the effectiveness of public school ELD programs, policies related to ELLs in public schools, linguistic and cultural diversities, the perspectives of ELD teachers, mainstream teachers, and the learning experiences of ELLs in public school settings, little research has been conducted to examine the same needs of international students in the private secondary schools in the United States (p. 141). Yin's study focused on the needs and overall experiences of international students at one private secondary school in the U.S., and is therefore relevant to informing this research study.

Because international students enrolled in private secondary schools typically come to the U.S. alone, (without their families) during their teenage years at their own expense, they are a distinct population from the ELL population, who typically come to the U.S. with parents or relatives, are eligible for ELD services in K-12 public schools, and might have been in the U.S. public school system since kindergarten (p. 140).

Yin (2013) examined the academic needs, spiritual growth, and overall experiences of 67 international secondary students at one private Christian school in Columbia, South Carolina. Yin found that four factors were the most bothersome to 50% of the international students surveyed:

- social relationships [e.g. with local, non-international students, and host parents];
- feeling of being an outsider;
- worries about not living up to parents' expectations; and
- cultural differences (2013, pp. 147-148).

In addition, Yin found that 51% of the international students who participated in the survey made the decision to come to the U.S. to study, while 48% were sent to the U.S. by their parents (p. 148). She found that the international students came to the U.S. for three main reasons: “. . . to learn English so that they could get a better job in the future, to get an education in the U.S. where education is more advanced, and to get a second chance to go to a good university” (p. 148). None of the students came to the U.S. private school for a Christian education, but instead for a good education, a good mastery of the English language, and a bright future (p. 148).

Yin suggested that further research on this topic should include observations of how international students interact with their native English-speaking peers, teachers, and dorm parents. The author also recommended that interviews be conducted with international students,

teachers, and dorm parents regarding their opinions and perspectives about the academic and spiritual growth of international students because the perspectives from different angles would help administration, teachers, and dorm parents understand how to better serve and lead international students (p. 150).

### **Quality education for secondary ELL's in the U.S.**

For U.S. schools that are teaching increasing amounts of immigrant ELL students, there is a model which really works. Lee (2012) examined three elements that make up a successful educational program for newcomer immigrant English language learners. She found that a successful educational program for newcomer immigrant ELL's is academically enriching, culturally responsive, and socially supportive (Lee, 2012, p. 66). Lee studied high schools in the Internationals Network for Public Schools in New York, which provide a high quality education to newcomer immigrant ELL's and have a reputation for successfully educating immigrant students from diverse backgrounds. She found that Network schools practiced a schoolwide investment (e.g. all teachers, not just ELD teachers, were equally concerned and proactive) in working with immigrant ELL's. In addition, Lee found that staff members in these schools display positive attitudes toward students' cultural and linguistic differences and actively seek to build on these students' backgrounds.

In contrast with Ingerson's 2011 study of one New York suburban public high school, Lee found in her 2012 study of international urban public high schools in New York City that the central strategies used by mainstream classroom teachers included systematic scaffolding of content along with language. She found that mainstream teachers accommodated the range of English proficiency levels in any given class by differentiating instruction. Most importantly, Lee found that high schools in the Internationals Network assigned ESL-certified teachers to

work as coequals with mainstream, content-area teachers in the same classroom to address language issues across subject areas.

In her essay, *How to Integrate Language and Content Instruction: A Training Manual*, Short (1991) stated: “For school success, ELLs must have opportunities to learn academic content while studying English so they do not fall behind native English-speaking peers” (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p. 108). This is similar to what Yin stated in her 2013 study of the overall experiences of 67 international high school students studying at a private school in South Carolina: “If ELL’s are in our classrooms, it is recommended that both language objectives and content objectives be included in planning so that students are aware of what they are expected to learn” (p. 145). In addition, Yin described a common teaching method of mainstream teachers at the private school in her research study who have international students enrolled in their classes: “Classroom teachers are encouraged to do short pre-teaching (or preview) sessions to ELL’s introducing new vocabulary words and concepts so that ELL’s will not get lost due to the lack of academic language in the big group” (p. 145).

The model of a successful educational program for newcomer immigrant ELL’s that Lee discovered in New York City urban public high schools is ideal; however, it may not always be fully replicated in other parts of the U.S. Lee acknowledged that most successful high schools for newcomer ELL’s are located in large urban areas where many teachers have experience dealing with diversity; however, current research shows that increasing numbers of ELL’s are settling in small towns, suburbs, and rural communities in the U.S. that have little experience dealing with cultural, racial, or linguistic diversity (Farrugia, 2014; Lee, 2012; Winter, 2014).

In her 2014 report entitled, *Charting New Pathways to Higher Education: International Secondary Students in the United States*, Farrugia stated, “The majority of international

secondary students in private schools (70%) attend either small or mid-size private schools with fewer than 300 students” (p. 20). In addition, Farrugia found that “About half of all international secondary students study in U.S. schools with a predominantly White student population, reflecting the overall racial composition of U.S. private secondary schools whose students are predominantly White (71%)” (p. 20).

These findings indicate that further research on this topic should include strategies on how to create successful models of education for immigrant ELL’s in smaller districts and schools such as Oswego High School in rural Oswego, New York (the school Ingerson studied in her research), beginning with providing professional development for teachers in these schools on cultural and linguistic diversity which emphasizes faculty collaboration and a schoolwide commitment to serving immigrant ELL’s.

### **Summary**

Overall the research reveals several issues concerning the education of mainland Chinese international students in U.S. private schools. These students enroll in U.S. private schools (often in rural or suburban areas) with varying levels of English ability, which affects their ability to succeed in school. The teachers who teach these mainland Chinese international students in their mainstream classes are largely unfamiliar with the diverse culture of these Chinese students, and have little to no experience teaching non-native speakers of English. Because California private schools are independently owned and operated and are not accountable to the state standards set by the California Department of Education, the quality of each private school’s educational program varies dramatically. However, it is the responsibility of each private school to plan and conduct a quality education for every student who the school chooses to enroll under direct

accountability to the students and their parents or guardians as outlined in the terms of the private school enrollment contract.

Research shows that there are definite factors which predict mainstream teachers' success in teaching international students and ELLs, and that there are public and private secondary schools in the U.S. which can serve as models for successfully educating such students. These schools share the following characteristics: (a) they provide ESL classes for secondary students in addition to mainstream classes, (b) they hold the expectation that all teachers (ESL and mainstream) will take responsibility for students' linguistic and academic learning in their classrooms, (c) their mainstream teachers include both language and content objectives in their lesson planning, and (d) they provide professional development opportunities for mainstream teachers in language acquisition, culturally responsive teaching, methods for teaching ELL students, and differentiating curriculum.

## Chapter 3: Methods

### Research Approach

This study utilized a qualitative approach with a constructivist worldview, phenomenological design, and intensive (depth) interviewing. According to Creswell (2014), “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). The qualitative research approach typically involves data collected in the research participant’s setting, data analysis building inductively from specific details to general themes, and the researcher interpreting the meaning of the data. This qualitative study explores the challenges facing Mandarin-speaking, mainland Chinese international secondary students in their first year attending one suburban private school in California which established an international student program in 2007.

The constructivist worldview is a typical approach to qualitative research. According to Creswell, “Social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work . . . the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (2014, p. 8). The intent of constructivist researchers is to interpret, or make sense of, the meanings others have about the world. Crotty (1998) identified the following assumptions that constructivist researchers hold:

1. Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that the participants can share their views.
2. Qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally. They also interpret what they find, an interpretation shaped by the researcher’s own experiences and background.
3. The process of qualitative research is largely inductive; the inquirer generates meaning from the data collected in the field. (pp. 42-65)

This study used a phenomenological design, or a type of inquiry from the fields of philosophy and psychology in which “. . . the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon, and typically involves conducting interviews” (Creswell, 2014, p. 14).

Intensive (depth) interviewing is a qualitative method “that involves open-ended, relatively unstructured questioning in which the interviewer seeks in-depth information on the interviewee’s feelings, experiences, and perceptions” (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 188). A semi-structured approach (Patton, 2002) of intensive interviewing was chosen because it ensured a high degree of consistency in the data collected, while also allowing for further probing to give participants the opportunity to elaborate further on their attitudes and experiences.

This study relied on the responses of international students to personal interviews conducted by the researcher. The themes that emerged from the personal interview data were analyzed to obtain valuable information regarding the nature of the challenges these participants faced in their first year of study in one suburban California private school. From these themes, the researcher formed conclusions regarding what components and experiences are necessary for an international student program in a suburban California private school to utilize in order to minimize the challenges that such students would normally face in that learning environment.

### **Background of the Researcher**

Shelby Bumgarner is a graduate student at Dominican University of California obtaining a Master’s Degree in Education with an emphasis in Curriculum & Instruction. She holds a California Single-Subject Teaching Credential in English, a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) Certificate, and a Bachelor’s degree in Bible, Theology, & Christian



Leadership from William Jessup University. While conducting this research study, she served in a dual position as a secondary mainstream English teacher and the International Student Advocate for both the middle school and high school at the K-12 California suburban private school in this research study.

In the last nine years, the school has accepted increasing numbers of international secondary students, particularly Mandarin-speaking students from mainland China, who come to study in the United States for the first time. The researcher's perceptions of the challenges facing international students who are learning in private schools have been shaped by her personal experiences with these students. The researcher taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Taipei City, Taiwan for four years (2007-2011), then English as a Second Language (ESL) to Asian international secondary students (the majority being Mandarin-speaking, from mainland China), for four years at an urban private school in San Francisco, California (2011-2015). In addition, she has taught ESL & American Culture classes in San Francisco to several groups of visiting international secondary students from schools in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou during Chinese New Year and summer vacation.

The researcher believes that her understanding of the educational context in which Chinese international secondary students find themselves upon their arrival at this suburban California private school was enhanced due to her role as both a teacher and advocate for these students. The researcher also believes that her awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity to many of the challenges encountered by first-year, Mandarin speaking international students from mainland China assisted her in working with the participants in this study. In addition, the researcher acknowledges that due to her previous experiences teaching first-year Mandarin

speaking international students from mainland China in an urban private school, she brings certain biases to this study and that these biases may shape her interpretation of the data collected.

### **Research Site**

This study was conducted during the spring semester of the 2015-2016 school year on the middle/high school campus of a K-12 private school in California where the researcher was concurrently teaching secondary mainstream English classes and serving as the International Student Advocate for the middle/high school international student body. The school's elementary and middle/high school campuses are located in a suburban neighborhood in a small, coastal city. In the 2015-2016 academic year, the middle/ high school campus was comprised of 194 students in grades six through 12, with 53 students in middle school (grades six through eight) and 141 students in high school (grades nine through 12). Of the middle school's 53 students, two were international students: one from mainland China and one from Taiwan. Of the high school's 141 students, 27 were international students: 24 from mainland China, two from South Korea, and one from Vietnam. Of the middle/high school's 25 students from mainland China, 10 were in their first year of study at this school.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were nine Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese international secondary students in grades seven, nine, 10, and 11 who were in their first year of attendance at this suburban California private school. None of the participants had studied at other schools in the U.S. prior to their enrollment at this private school in the 2015-2016 school year. When they were interviewed by the researcher during the months of April and May, 2016, all nine of the participants had already been studying at this private school for at least eight months. Five participants were male and four were female. All of the participants were from

middle or upper class families in mainland China, and all except one student came to the U.S. alone, without their family members. All of the students lived in host homes with native English-speaking legal guardians who have affiliations with the private school, except for the student who came to live with immediate family members already living in the area where the school is located. All of the students attended school consistently in China before arriving in the U.S. and did not have any gaps in their education.

Though the campus' demographics includes international students from countries other than mainland China (e.g. Taiwan, South Korea, and Vietnam), the researcher chose to focus on Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese international students only for this study because of the statistical evidence that mainland Chinese students currently make up almost 50% of America's international secondary student population (United States Immigration & Customs Enforcement, 2015) and because of her background and interest in teaching ESL to Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese international students.

Of the nine Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese first-year international students who chose to participate in this study, one student was in grade seven, three students were in grade nine, four students were in grade 10, and one student was in grade 11. Upon their arrival at the school's New International Student Orientation on August 17, 2015, each first-year international student was given the *Milestones Placement Test* (Heinle Cengage Learning, 2009) to determine his/her current level of English ability in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Of the nine mainland Chinese international students who participated in this study, one scored at the Beginning Level (Level A) of ELD; five scored at the Intermediate Level (Level B) of ELD; and three scored at the Advanced Level (Level C) of ELD.

It is this private school's standard practice to place all international middle school and high school students in mainstream classes alongside their native English-speaking peers upon their arrival at school, regardless of their English ability level. However, one specialized class for high school international students is offered, called "Listening & Speaking." Generally, international high school students who score at Level A or B (Beginning or Intermediate) on the *Milestones Placement Test* are placed in the "Listening & Speaking" class in addition to mainstream classes, and international students who score at Level C or above are placed in mainstream classes with no ELD support. In the middle school, no specialized classes for international students are offered. All international middle school students, regardless of their English ability level, are placed in mainstream classes alongside their native-English speaking peers with no ELD support.

### **Access and Permissions**

The researcher received permission to recruit students and conduct the study via written consent from the Head of School at the California suburban private school described in the subsection, "Sample and Site." A sample copy of the consent form is included in Appendix A. A written *Translator Confidentiality Agreement* with a bilingual Mandarin/English translator who is over 18 years old was obtained in person (see Appendix B). Consent forms were presented in person to the English speaking, legal guardians of potential Mandarin speaking international student participants from this school, soliciting written permission for allowing their international student to participate in this study. A sample copy of the consent form is included in Appendix C.

Upon receipt of permission and consent from their legal guardians, first-year, Mandarin speaking mainland Chinese international students who attend this school were recruited via face-

to-face communication. Written assent from the participants in this study was obtained in person by the researcher via a bilingual (Mandarin and English) assent form in the presence of the legal guardian and the aid of a personal translator (Mandarin/English) to clarify the voluntary, confidential, and anonymous safeguards for the study. A sample copy of the assent form is included in Appendix D.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher informed all participants in the study about their rights as a participant with the aid of a personal Mandarin/English translator. In order to be sensitive to the socio-cultural background of the participants, emphasis was provided by the researcher to clarify the following:

1. That participation was voluntary, and that the legal guardians and/or the participants could decline participation in the study, and/or withdraw from it at any time.
2. That participation in the study would be anonymous and confidential.
3. That their decision to participate in this study would have no influence on his/her present or future status in the school.

This research study adheres to ethical standards for the treatment of human subjects, was approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at Dominican University of California, and was assigned the number 10429 (see Appendix E). The researcher kept the identities of the participants anonymous by using pseudonyms to replace real names. Hard data, including transcriptions of the personal interviews and notes taken by the researcher during the interviews, is stored in a locked file cabinet, and digital data is password protected. Each transcript was reviewed by the researcher and by the interviewee only during the member checking process.

Data was collected from each of the participants via semi-structured individual interviews during the months of April and May, 2016. These interviews were approximately 45 minutes in length and were audiotaped. A translator, who is fluent in both Mandarin and English, was present at each individual interview to provide assistance. Interviews were conducted on the middle/high school campus of the suburban California private school, with the exception of three interviews that were held at one legal guardian's house per his request. The interview locations used at the private school were the school conference room and the researcher's classroom. All of the interviews were conducted by one researcher who generated field notes during each interview and personally transcribed the interviews using the audio recordings.

In order to ensure standard procedures from one interview to another, the following components were included in the interview protocol: (a) a heading: date, place, interviewer, interviewee; (b) the interview questions; (c) spaces between the questions to record responses; and (d) a final thank-you statement to acknowledge the time the participant spent during the interview (Creswell, 2014, p. 194). In order to ensure validity and reliability of the data, three strategies from Creswell (2014) were employed:

- member checking;
- using rich, thick description to convey the findings; and
- clarification of researcher bias (pp. 201-202).

These strategies are discussed further in this chapter under the sub-heading, "Data Validity and Reliability."

The interview questions in this study are developmentally appropriate for adolescent-age students (Nieto & Bode, 2012) and were created from scholarly sources on interviewing methods (Berg, 2004; Check & Schutt, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Paris & Winn, 2014; Patton, 2002). The

content of the interview questions reflect both the research literature on the previously documented challenges ELLs have faced in mainstream classroom environments, as well as the primary research question serving as the basis of this study: “What are the challenges facing Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese, international secondary students in their first year of study at a suburban California private school?” The primary research question was grounded in the theoretical rationale that the researcher is applying to this study: Cummins’ *Theory of Communicative and Academic Language* (1981) and *Theory of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency* (1979); Krashen’s *Theory of Positive-Affective Filter* (1982); and Vygotsky’s *Zone of Proximal Development Theory* (circa 1934). These four foundational theories are useful to apply to this study, and are utilized as the lens through which the researcher analyzed the participants’ perceived challenges in learning during their first year at this school. Twenty questions (not including follow-up questions) were included in the personal interviews.

### **Interview Questions**

1. Describe your early school experiences in China.
  - a. Where did you go to school?
  - b. Did you feel comfortable in school? Why or why not?
  - c. Were you a good student? Why or why not?
2. Tell me about your experiences in school now.
  - a. What classes are you taking at school this semester?
  - b. What do you find difficult about your classes at this school?
  - c. What do you like about your classes at this school?
  - d. What’s your favorite subject? Least favorite? Why?
  - e. Are you a good student? Why or why not?
  - f. What class do you have the highest grade in?
  - g. What class do you have the lowest grade in?
  - h. Are you passing all of your classes?
3. What do you think are the greatest challenges you are facing at school right now?
4. Are grades important to you? Why or why not? Are they important to your parents? What are their expectations for your grades?

5. What kinds of activities do you participate in at school? Are you in any clubs? Sports? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel like you get enough help/support in learning the English language? Describe what help/support you do or do not get at this school.
7. Do you understand your teachers when they are teaching you in class?
8. What do you think your teachers could do differently to help you understand what they are teaching, and to help you succeed in their classes?
9. Do you feel that your teachers show equal interest and offer equal support to both the local students and the international students in your classes?
10. Do your teachers understand your culture? Your language? If so, how do they show you that they do? If not, how do they show you this? Can you give some examples? What could your teachers do differently?
11. Is there anything you are worried about right now with regard to school, grades, or your learning?
12. What differences do you see between this American private school and the school you attended in China?
13. What do you miss most about your school or the education system in China?
14. What do you like best about this school or the education system in America?
15. Do you think anything is keeping you, or preventing you from getting a good education?
16. Complete the following sentence: When things go bad . . .
17. Complete the following sentence: I'm most happy when . . .
18. Do you think of yourself as successful? Why or why not?
19. What do you think you have to do to become successful later in life?
20. If you were the principal of this school, what would you do to make it better? What changes would you make? (Give specific suggestions related to teachers, books, classes, counselors, etc.)

### **Data Analysis Approach**

According to Creswell, “. . . data collection and data analysis must be a simultaneous process in qualitative research” (2014, p. 209). Researchers “. . . seek to identify and describe



patterns and themes from the perspective of the participant(s), then attempt to understand and explain these patterns and themes” (p. 210). The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed according to the data analysis procedures outlined by Check & Schutt (2012).

First, the researcher examined the interview transcripts and field notes. The second step was to review each interview transcript, identifying the similarities and differences between the responses of the participants. Next, the researcher looked for key words in each question that indicated a main idea. While focusing on the main ideas within each transcript, the researcher singled out what she interpreted to be the challenges these students were experiencing in their daily lives at the suburban California private school. A list of these challenges as identified by the response patterns and themes from each student’s transcript was then generated by the researcher and compared to distinguish the similarities and differences among and between each participant. To provide specificity, the findings from this generative list were organized by interview question. Next, a list of recurring themes from student responses was generated and analyzed in the context of the theoretical rationale and the primary research question to generate findings and conclusions. Finally, the researcher included paraphrases and direct quotes from the student responses in order to support specific findings in her analysis.

### **Data Validity and Reliability**

To ensure internal validity and reliability, the following strategies from Creswell (2014) were employed: (a) member checking (p. 201), (b) using “rich, thick description to convey the findings” (p. 202), and (c) clarification of researcher bias (p. 202).

#### **Member checking.**

After transcribing the individual interviews, the researcher took the transcriptions back to the participants in a group gathering on May 6, 2016 with the guardians of the participants present in

order to determine the accuracy of the transcriptions. When a participant read his/her own transcript and wanted to make changes, the participant made the changes by writing directly on the transcript and then verifying via conversation with the researcher that the changes made were accurate. The researcher then re-typed the transcripts with both old and new comments included, with a date on it for the researcher's reference.

### **Using rich, thick description to convey the findings.**

When qualitative researchers give detailed descriptions of the setting or offer many perspectives about a theme, the results of the study become, according to Creswell, “. . . more realistic and richer. This procedure can add to the validity of the findings” (p. 202). Using the typed transcripts, the researcher compiled the nine participants' responses to the most relevant research questions and typed them verbatim instead of paraphrasing, in order to employ this method. In addition, the researcher attempted to compare the specific findings of the study with the current research literature, offering multiple perspectives in her discussion and analysis to add to the validity and reliability of the findings.

### **Clarification of researcher bias.**

At the outset of this study, researcher bias was articulated in writing under the sub-heading, “Background of the Researcher.” Finally, all phases of this project were subject to close examination by an external advisor who is experienced in qualitative research methodology.

### **Reporting the Findings**

The results of this study are presented in the typical form for qualitative research: descriptive, narrative form. Thus, “rich, thick description” (Creswell, 2014, p. 202) is used to communicate the challenges first-year, mainland Chinese international students face in a suburban California private school. The primary findings are reported in combined form,

identifying what commonalities and differences were found in participant responses to 15 of the interview questions that the researcher deemed to be the most relevant in regard to the primary research question. In order to maintain privacy, pseudonyms are used for the participants, as well as any teachers and students the participants mentioned by name during their individual interviews.

Under the sub-heading, “Discussion and Analysis of the Findings,” the researcher attempts to identify recurring patterns and themes in the comments of the participants that shed light on the primary research question. Also in this section, the researcher compares the specific findings of the study with the current research literature in order to build an accurate portrait of the challenges that mainland Chinese international secondary students face in their first year of study at this suburban California private school.

## Chapter 4: Findings, Discussion, and Analysis

### Results

The researcher interviewed nine participants who were Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese international secondary students in grades seven, nine, 10, and 11, and were all in their first year at a suburban California private school when this research study was conducted in the spring semester of 2016. When they were interviewed by the researcher in the months of April and May, 2016, all nine of the participants had been studying at this private school for at least eight months. Twenty questions were asked by the researcher, with a bilingual Mandarin/English translator present, during the nine one-on-one interviews with each international student. Fifteen interview questions most relevant to the primary research question are stated as follows, with pseudonyms used for the participants [and any teachers or students they mentioned by name], and a description of the participants' responses following each question.

#### **“What do you find difficult about your classes at this school?”**

In response to this first question, three common themes emerged: difficulty with reading comprehension in the English language, especially in mainstream English and World History classes; difficulty understanding what the teacher is saying in class; and difficulty taking tests. As one participant stated, “I think it’s [World History] kind of challenging to me. Like for me, as a Chinese student, it’s like English plus World History” (Interview with Wendy Li, 4/13/16). Another participant said, “I can read the question, but I can’t answer it. I can’t write answers to questions” (Interview with Tiffany Lu, 4/15/16). Two responses to this question were different from the other responses. One participant said Biology class was hard, while another said that they didn’t find anything difficult about the classes at this school.

**“What do you think are the greatest challenges you are facing at school right now?”**

Three common themes were apparent in response to this question: language with regard to understanding and using academic English in the classroom; language with regard to using English to make friends with American students; and sociocultural differences in making friends. In response to this question, one participant stated, “Language. Listening to the teachers. And social. Communicating with the local students” (Interview with Richard Yao, 4/16/16). Another participant said, “. . . like to make friends – it’s very hard. Like, we just communicate with international students. I think it’s hard to join the local student group because they just communicate to me about the subjects in school, but not other things” (Interview with Wendy Li, 4/13/16). One response to this question was different from the other responses. One participant said the greatest challenge they are facing at school has to do with religious things.

**“Do you feel like you get enough help/support in learning the English language?****Describe what help/support you do or do not get at this school.”**

In response to this question, all of the participants mentioned some form of help/support they get in learning the English language to varying degrees. Six of the participants said they feel this help/support is enough. Three participants had different responses indicating that the help/support they get in learning English is not enough.

Three sources of help/support in learning the English language were commonly mentioned: the help/support participants received from (a) teachers, (b) host parents, and (c) friends [both international students and native English-speaking friends]. One response was different from the others. This participant stated, “It’s like the whole environment is English speaking, so it kind of force me to speak English” (Interview with Karen Lao, 4/22/16). None of the participants mentioned help/support they do not get at this school.

**“Do you understand your teachers when they are teaching you in class?”**

In response to this question, three participants said, yes, they understand their teachers when they are teaching them in class. Three participants said, “sometimes” or “a little bit.” Two participants gave different responses naming particular classes in which they generally do not understand the teacher: English, World History, and Bible class. One participant said, “not really.”

**“What do you think your teachers could do differently to help you understand what they are teaching, and to help you succeed in their classes?”**

In response to this question, four participants said their teachers don’t need to do anything differently to help them understand what they are teaching, and to help them succeed in their classes. Five participants said their teachers could do some things differently to help them understand what they are teaching, and to help them succeed in their classes. These participants gave the following suggestions for what their teachers could do differently:

- write down their expectations for classwork and homework,
- teach more slowly and give students more time to start the work in class,
- use easier words to explain,
- speak more slowly, and
- help students understand what happened in class each day.

As one participant said, “. . . teacher can use easier word to explain something. Don’t make it so hard. Speak slowly” (Interview with Kyle Tam, 4/16/16).

**“Do you feel that your teachers show equal interest and offer equal support to both the local students and the international students in your classes?”**

Seven out of nine participants responded “yes” or “yeah” to this question and gave examples to indicate that they feel their teachers show equal interest and offer equal support to both the local students and the international students in their classes. Math and World History were mentioned as the two classes where special accommodations for various students were being made. Two participants responded “no” and gave examples to indicate that they feel their teachers do not show equal interest and offer equal support to both the local students and the international students in their classes. As one participant said, “I think teachers treat us, like, same. And some teacher care about international student. Miss Jackson [World History teacher] care more about international student. She always help international student for something we should do” (Interview with Richard, 4/16/16). Another participant said, “Yes. If I push someone, the teacher talk to me. If someone push me, the teacher talk them. So we equal” (Interview with Ben, 5/04/16).

**“Do your teachers understand your culture? Your language? If so, how do they show you that they do? If not, how do they show you this? Can you give some examples? What could your teachers do differently?”**

In response to this question, all nine of the participants said their teachers had some understanding of the Chinese culture. None of the participants said their teachers understood the Chinese language. In response to the question, “How do they [the teachers] show you that they do [understand the Chinese culture]?”, five participants gave examples of school-wide events and activities planned for international students, such as the Chinese New Year Chapel and Chinese New Year potluck lunch; one participant was uncertain about whether the teachers understand Chinese culture; and three participants gave different answers. Two of the different answers indicated that some teachers do not let international students speak Chinese in class, and

one answer indicated that their teachers want to teach international students about American culture. As one participant said,

They know, but not like us. Most of teacher, they know a little bit, like the surface of the culture, but not too deep. In my opinion, I think American teachers don't have to force themselves to know Chinese culture. (Interview with Tiffany Lu, 4/15/16)

Another participant said, "A little . . . just like the Chapel, to celebrate the Chinese New Year. And also the potluck with the Chinese food" (Interview with Kyle Tam, 4/16/16). None of the participants responded to the question, "What could your teachers do differently?"

**"Is there anything you are worried about right now with regard to school, grades, or your learning?"**

In response to this question, three common themes emerged: worries about current learning with regard to their English ability, grades, and passing quizzes and tests; worries about situations in their host families; and worries about the future with regard to planning for the following year's courses in high school, and planning for college. One participant said, "no," indicating that there is nothing they are worried about right now with regard to school, grades, or their learning. One participant said, "I worry about test, and quiz, and learn. Like, so, sometimes, there's word I don't understand. I look translator. I worry about translator; don't have what words mean" (Interview with Ben Wong, 5/04/16). Another participant said, "Maybe like, how to take subjects for next year, and I don't know which college I can pick. I don't know how to do college applications, too" (Interview with Warren Chan, 4/16/16).

**"What differences do you see between this American private school and the school you attended in China?"**

Six main themes emerged from the participants' responses to this question: (a) school dismissal times are different, (b) degrees of freedom in school and after school are different,



(c) the amount of homework assigned is different, (d) the relationship between students and teachers is different in the U.S. than it is in China, (e) the amount of school field trips allotted for the school year is different, and (f) class size is different. As one participant said,

In China, they have tons of homework, even at weekend. And after school, they can't do their own outdoor activity, such as sports, drama, choir, whatever – the only thing they do after school is they study and also, they have extra classes or homework for weekend. Like, here, at the weekend, we don't have lot of homework; just a little, but in China, it's like tons of homework. The parents even find tutors to do extra work. (Interview with Warren Chan, 4/16/16)

Another participant said, “Teachers teach in different ways. At China, only teacher talks in the class. Student can't say anything. And the homework. Chinese has too much homework. Chinese school has many student. Size is different” (Interview with Kyle Tam, 4/16/16).

**“What do you miss most about your school or the education system in China?”**

In response to this question, five out of nine participants said they do not miss the education system in China. Six out of nine said they miss their friends and classmates most, and three said that though they do not miss the education system in China, they do miss their teachers in China. As one participant said,

My friends. I don't miss the education in China – too strict. Here is not strict. The teachers give you more freedom. Like here, we can make friends with teachers. But in China, teacher is teacher and student is student. There is distance between teacher and student. But not a distance here. (Interview with Wendy Li, 4/13/16)

Another participant said, “My friends. I don't miss the education system” (Interview with Tiffany Lu, 4/15/16).

**“What do you like best about this school or the education system in America?”**

In response to this question, the recurring themes were: small class size, enabling teachers to easily answer the students' questions; more freedom in school and after school; no

distance in the relationship between teachers and students; less focus on studying and not much homework; more time to exercise, play sports, and do other activities; earlier school dismissal time; and more field trips. One participant gave a different answer indicating that she needs more time to adjust to the American education system.

As one participant said, “It’s more freedom. And also, you can really be friends with teacher, instead of, like, teacher is teacher and student is student. Have good relationship with teachers” (Interview with Warren Chan, 4/16/16). Another participant said, “Few homework. More freedom” (Interview with Richard Yao, 4/16/16).

**“Do you think anything is preventing, or keeping you, from getting a good education?”**

In response to this question, two of out nine participants said no, indicating that they do not think anything is preventing them from getting a good education. Four participants said their English skills are preventing them from getting a good education. Three participants gave other responses. Other responses included: too many activities at school interfere with education, international students want better communication with American students, and the education is not equal because international students always have to communicate in their second language.

One participant said, “Language. My English skill. Speaking English. I hope have more communication with American students. I want to improve my English a lot, and make more friends with them” (Interview with Warren Chan, 4/16/16). Another participant stated,

My language is not good enough to understand everything in class, and also, it’s easier for me to feel sleepy when teacher teach the class, because the language, and also, I can’t really understand, so that’s why makes me sleepy. (Interview with Kyle Tam, 4/16/16)

**“Do you think of yourself as successful? Why or why not?”**

In response to this question, five out of nine participants answered, “no,” or “not yet.” Three participants said, “I’m OK,” and one said, “I’m good at everything except English.” Of the five participants who answered “no,” or “not yet,” the common themes that emerged from their responses were: inability to meet parents’ expectations, lack of English skills, lack of self-confidence, and lack of knowledge about American culture.

One participant said, “No, because I’m not getting the grades my parents want” (Interview with Tiffany Lu, 4/15/16). Another participant stated, “Other people think I’m successful, but I don’t think so. I’m not very confident in myself” (Interview with Wendy Li, 4/13/16).

**“What do you think you have to do to become successful later in life?”**

In response to this question, six out of nine participants said that they need to improve either their grades, their English skills, or their knowledge about American culture. The other three participants gave different answers. The themes that emerged from these participants’ responses were: meeting parents’ expectations; following one’s own mind instead of others’ thinking; and studying the good habits and traits of other people in order to learn from them.

One participant said,

I think I have to work harder on my speaking, ‘cause I’m afraid of speaking, especially in front of a bunch of people. For English and World History, when I have to do oral presentation in front of the whole class, I am so nervous. I can be more confident in myself. (Interview with Wendy Li, 4/13/16)

Another participant stated, “I will train myself according to my parents’ expectations, because that’s what my parents want” (Interview with Tiffany Lu, 4/15/16).

**“If you were the principal of this school, what would you do to make it better? What changes would you make? (Give specific suggestions related to teachers, books, classes, counselors, etc.)”**

With regard to this question, four common themes emerged from the participants’ responses: suggestions for helping international students improve their English language ability; expanding extracurricular activities available to students; offering additional courses for students; and hiring teachers with higher degrees and more experience. Five out of nine participants mentioned specific suggestions for helping international students to improve their English language ability. These suggestions were as follows:

- Chinese students should study basic English instead of wasting time in Study Hall,
- the principal should talk with the Chinese students more,
- school should start earlier and more classwork and homework should be given at school,
- Logic class should be taken off as a requirement for incoming ninth grade students because it is too difficult to understand, and
- international students should receive more help with how to study, get along with American students, and learn English faster.

One participant gave a different answer, stating that this American private school should adopt an earlier start time and be more strict, give more classwork and homework, and schedule all quizzes and tests on the same day as is common in public schools in China.

One student said,

I don't really know what I can do for American students, but I can teach international students how to study in America and I want find a way for international students get along with American students more. Also, I want teach international students find way to learn English faster. It's the most big problem in America – the language problem. So, if I can fix this problem, a lot of problem will be fixed. (Interview with Toby Lam, 4/28/16)

Another student said, “. . . like, for Study Hall, I want Chinese students to study basic English to improve their English ability. In Study Hall, some Chinese student, they didn't do Study Hall; they just, like, talking” (Interview with Warren Chan, 4/16/16).

### **Discussion and Analysis of the Findings**

Through evaluating the responses of the participants in this study, it is clear that this sample of Mandarin speaking, mainland Chinese international students in their first year of study at a suburban California private school faced many challenges in their learning. The recurring patterns in their responses to the questions, “What do you find difficult about your classes at this school?” and “What do you think are the greatest challenges you are facing at school right now?”, showed that the participants faced difficulties in the following areas:

- understanding the teacher and what is going on in the mainstream class,
- having to learn difficult content in mainstream classes while still learning English,
- adjusting to a different educational system and culture,
- making friends with the American students at school.

The difficulties that the participants in this study faced with regard to their learning are similar to the results that Ingerson (2011) found in her study of ELL students in a public high school in rural Oswego, New York, and that Reeves (2006) found in her study of secondary teacher attitudes toward including ELLs in mainstream classes. Ingerson's study found that: ELLs experience difficulties in the classroom, there are barriers which prevent academic achievement for ELLs, and there is work to be done to remove those barriers (2011, pp. 21-23).

Ingerson's study showed the need for administrators to provide professional development opportunities on teaching students with limited English proficiency, and the need for teachers to make modest changes in their teaching methods to accommodate the ELL students in their mainstream classes. Reeves' study found that "a discrepancy exists between teachers' general attitudes toward ELL inclusion and their attitudes toward specific aspects of ELL inclusion" (2006, p. 137) and that "teachers are working under misconceptions about how second languages are learned" (p. 137). Reeves' study showed that it is imperative for all mainstream teachers to possess a basic understanding of the second-language acquisition process.

The difficulties that the participants in this study faced with regard to making friends with the American students at school are similar to the results that Harklau (1994) found in her study of second language learning in a suburban, racially and ethnically diverse northern California high school where the population of LEP students consisted of less than 100 of the high school's 1,600 total students. Harklau found that almost all of the talk between native English speaking students and their ELL peers was related to school topics, and that there was "little social chatter" exchanged between these groups of students (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p. 50). This study showed that ELL students perceived that their second-language ability and immigrant background had a profound effect on their social lives.

Only three out of nine participants said that they understand their teachers when they are teaching in class. Six said that they don't understand their teachers when they are teaching in class, or that they don't understand everything their teachers are saying in class. This is similar to what Harklau (1994) found in her study of second language learning at a suburban northern California public high school. In their book, *So Much to Say: Adolescents, Bilingualism, & ESL in the Secondary School*, Faltis & Wolfe said of Harklau's study:

Much of the mainstream classroom time at Gateview was taken up in teacher-led presentations followed by some discussion . . . because the majority of their audience is native English-speaking, teachers tend not to make the adjustments in input that they might if they were speaking exclusively with non-native speakers; for example, reducing the speed or complexity of talk; increasing repetition and pausing; or contextualizing abstract concepts through the use of nonverbal cues such as pictures, demonstrations, or gestures. In addition, some teachers' talk contained features such as puns or asides that made it even more difficult for non-native speaking learners to understand. (1999, pp. 44-45)

Harklau found that most of the teacher-generated input in Gateview High School's mainstream classes was incomprehensible to the LEP students and "caused them considerable frustration" (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p. 45).

While four out of nine participants said their teachers don't need to do anything differently to help them succeed in class, five participants had suggestions for what teachers could do differently to help them understand and succeed in their mainstream classes:

- write down their expectations for classwork and homework,
- teach more slowly and give students more time to start the work in class,
- use easier words to explain -- don't make it so hard,
- speak more slowly and help students understand what happened in class today.

These suggestions that the international students had for their teachers fall under the categories of classroom time constraints and content delivery, or how teachers deliver content in their classes, and are similar to what Long (2008) found in her study which examined the learning experiences of non-English speaking background secondary students in mainstream English classes in Australia. Long found time constraints to be an overwhelming problem for many of these students in classroom situations such as: the time allowed in class to respond to questions, finish tasks in class, and complete homework and assessment tasks (2008, p. 268). Another significant finding of Long's study was the need for teachers to develop an awareness of how

their delivery of content (e.g. the vocabulary they used to explain important concepts or directions for completing homework) impacted the learning experiences of these students in the classroom (p. 268). Long's study showed that time constraints in the classroom and how teachers deliver content are two key areas which were identified as being problematic for non-English speaking background secondary students in mainstream English classes in Australia, suggesting that adequate support should be provided to both students and teachers in order to ensure equity and successful learning outcomes for these students.

All nine participants felt that their teachers have a surface-level understanding of Chinese culture and no understanding of the Chinese language. The participants mentioned this as being evidenced by the one-time school-wide event for international students – the all-school assembly in honor of Chinese New Year and the one time the school had a special Chinese food lunch. However, the majority of the participants didn't seem too concerned about this. One participant said, "I think American teachers don't have to force themselves to know Chinese culture," (Interview with Tiffany Lu, 4/15/16), while another participant said, ". . . they [American teachers] want to teach students *American* [emphasis added] culture," (Interview with Toby Lam, 4/28/16), meaning the Chinese students are here to learn American culture, and not the other way around.

Research shows that sociocultural factors play a significant role in second-language acquisition (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Pu, 2010;). Some examples of sociocultural factors include how people learn, interact with one another, carry out daily tasks, conduct business, and love or hate another person (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006, pp. 19-20). Students need to feel that their language and culture are accepted and validated by the school in order to be successful there. Thus, it is imperative that the teacher learns everything possible



about the culture, background, and prior experiences of each student in his/her class and utilizes every kind of support available to advance the education for ELLs (p. 29).

When asked if they feel their teachers show equal interest and offer equal support to both the local students and the international students in their classes, seven out of nine participants responded in the affirmative and gave examples showing that some teachers in some classes are making accommodations on quizzes and tests for exceptional (e.g. high-achieving) learners and international students learning English. Math and World History were mentioned as the two classes where special accommodations were being made. However, no accommodations were mentioned for mainstream English classes or Logic, Bible, or Biology, which were often mentioned by the participants as being classes where international students experience the most difficulty in their learning.

With response to this same question, two out of nine participants responded negatively and gave examples showing that at least two teachers are not showing equal interest and offering equal support to both the local students and the international students in their classes. While current research shows that all teachers need to be familiar with both language development and second-language acquisition and have the ability to adapt curriculum in their content area for students whose first language is not English, research also shows that many teachers have not had access to this knowledge in their pre-service programs or professional development classes after becoming teachers (Howard, 2006; Ingerson, 2011; Long, 2008; Miller & Endo, 2003; Milnes & Cheng, 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Pu, 2010; Reeves, 2006; Youngs & Youngs, Jr., 2001).

In Youngs and Youngs, Jr.'s (2001) study of predictors of mainstream teachers' attitudes toward ESL students, they found that mainstream teachers are more likely to demonstrate

positive attitudes toward teaching ESL students if the teachers possess one or more of these characteristics: the teacher took a foreign language course or multicultural education course; works in the humanities, social sciences, or natural/physical sciences versus applied disciplines; had some previous ESL training; has lived or taught outside the United States; has previously interacted with a culturally diverse population of ESL students; and is female (p. 116). Youngs' and Youngs, Jr.'s study shows that concrete actions can and should be taken by teachers and schools to provide teachers with professional development opportunities that will give them the skills needed to successfully teach the ESL students in their mainstream classes, which will in turn result in a positive attitude toward teaching these students.

When asked if there was anything the participants are worried about with regard to school, grades, or their learning, the recurring themes were: worries about current learning with regard to their English ability, grades, and passing quizzes and tests; worries about situations in their host families; and worries about the future with regard to planning for the following year's courses in high school, and planning for college. This is similar to the results Yin (2013) found in her study which examined the overall experiences of international secondary students studying at a private Christian high school in South Carolina. Yin found four main factors to be the most distressing overall for 50% of the 67 international students she surveyed (2013, pp. 147-148). While three of these factors had to do with social relationships, one main factor she found was international students' worries about not living up to their parents' expectations (p. 148).

Additionally, in her study examining academic coping among Taiwanese adolescents, Shih (2015) found that Taiwanese secondary students often evaluate themselves based on their academic performance, and as a result, school can be a stressful experience for adolescent students (p. 175). This relates to the three recurring themes stated above regarding the worries

the participants have with regard to their English ability, grades, and passing quizzes and tests; worries about situations in their host families; and worries about the future with regard to planning for the following year's courses in high school, and planning for college. Moreover, a recent survey conducted in Taiwan by the Child Welfare League Foundation (CWLF) suggests that academic burdens and parents' expectations are the primary sources of stress experienced by Taiwanese adolescents (Soong, 2011, p. 1). Forty-eight percent of the 2,133 fifth through eighth grade students surveyed in Taipei City indicated that they received punishment from their parents for not fulfilling parents' expectations (p. 1).

Regarding the differences between this American private school and the schools the participants attended in China, the main themes from the participants' responses were: in China, students spend most of their time studying, and there is not a lot of free time; here at this private school, students get out early and there is more freedom in school and after school; the relationship between students and teachers is different in the U.S.; students experience better relationships with their teachers at this American private school than they did in China; here at this private school, there are more outdoor activities and more field trips than the schools they attended in China.

When asked what they miss most about their school or the education system in China, five out of nine participants said they do not miss the education system in China. Six out of nine participants said they miss their friends and classmates most, and three mentioned that though they do not miss the education system in China, they do miss their teachers in China.

Regarding what they like best about this private school or the education system in the U.S., the recurring themes were: smaller class size, enabling teachers to easily answer the students questions; more freedom in school and after school; no distance in the relationship

between teachers and students; less focus on studying and not much homework; more time to exercise, play sports, and do other activities; earlier school dismissal time; and more field trips.

Research shows that the average class size in mainland Chinese secondary schools is much larger than in the U.S., with 40-50 students per class considered the norm (Romanowski, 2006; Yang, et al., 2013). In his study of issues facing K-12 teachers in mainland China, Romanowski (2006) found large class size to be a major concern for both teachers and students because of the following disadvantages they present in students' learning: reduced teacher-student interaction; limited opportunities for on-on-one teaching, and the lack of opportunity for students to ask questions and express their own ideas and perspectives (p. 80). Thus, it is not surprising that the participants in the researcher's study noted the smaller class size, enabling teachers to easily answer the students' questions (Interview with Tiffany Lu, 4/15/16; Interview with Warren Chan, 4/16/16; Interview with Kerry Wu, 4/19/16; Interview with Karen Lao, 4/22/16; Interview with Ben Wong, 5/04/16) as one of the characteristics they liked best about this private school or the education system in the U.S.

Research also shows that education in mainland China centers around high stakes testing (Romanowski, 2006). Chinese students spend most of their academic lives preparing for the *gao kao*, or College Entrance Exam (CEE), which holds the power either to grant or deny student admission to universities in mainland China (p. 77). Students' performance on this exam directly impacts the economic and social quality of their future lives. As one participant in the researcher's study said, "We only have one test to decide our college, future, something" (Interview with Kerry Wu, 4/19/16). Without the systemic pressure of teachers having to prepare students for such a high stakes test at the end of their high school career, it is no wonder that the participants in this study noted that there is less focus on studying and not much homework

(Interview with Wendy Li, 4/13/16; Interview with Richard Yao, 4/16/16; Interview with Kyle Tam, 4/16/16) as another characteristic they liked best about this private school or the education system in the U.S.

In response to the question, “Do you think anything is keeping you, or preventing you, from getting a good education?”, four out of nine participants said their English skills are preventing them from getting a good education. Other responses included: too many activities at school interfere with education, international students want better communication with American students, and the education is not equal because international students always have to communicate in their second language.

When asked if they think of themselves as being successful, five out of nine participants said, “no,” or “not yet”; three said, “I’m OK,” and one said, “I’m good at everything except English.” Regarding what they need to do to become successful later in life, six out of nine participants said that they need to improve their grades, their English skills, or their knowledge about American culture.

In response to the question, “If you were the principal of this school, what would you do to make it better?”, five out of nine participants mentioned suggestions for helping international students to improve their English language ability:

- Chinese students should study basic English instead of wasting time in Study Hall,
- the principal should talk with the Chinese students more,
- start school earlier and give more classwork and homework,
- take Logic class off as a requirement for incoming ninth grade international students because it is too difficult to understand, and

- help international students with: how to study, get along with American students, and learn English faster.

One participant said, ‘It’s the most big problem in America – the language problem. So, if I can fix this problem, a lot of problem will be fixed’ (Interview with Toby Lam, 4/28/16). These suggestions from the participants indicate that mainland Chinese international students who are in their first year of study at a suburban California private school are experiencing challenges in their education. However, the international students themselves offer significant insights from their own perspective regarding what practical supports are needed in order for them to be successful in their new school environment; not only academically, but socially, as well.

Three of the participants’ five suggestions have to do with strategic planning for classes that will specifically support the international students’ need for improving their English skills and either removing or improving classes that are seen as barriers to their academic achievement during their first year of study at this school: namely, Logic class (required of all incoming ninth graders at this school), which was deemed by one participant as being “too difficult to understand” (Interview with Kyle Tam, 4/16/16), and Study Hall, which was described by another participant as being as misuse of time, when the time could be better spent studying basic English (Interview with Warren Chan, 4/16/16). Two of the five suggestions have to do with relational and structural changes that specific school personnel can make to enhance the experience for mainland Chinese international students in their first year: administration (namely, the high school principal) being more visible around campus and spending more time deliberately engaging in conversation with Chinese students, and administration changing the school start time to an earlier time in order to accommodate the international students’ need for building up their English language skills.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

The findings showed that the mainland Chinese international students who were interviewed for this study did experience challenges in their first year of education in a suburban California private school. These challenges were concentrated in the following areas:

- understanding the teacher and what is going on in the mainstream class,
- having to learn difficult content in mainstream classes while still learning English,
- adjusting to a different educational system and culture, and
- making friends with the American students at school.

The greatest challenges the participants faced at school were connected with using the English language.

While some participants felt that the help/support they got at school in learning the English language was enough, some felt it was not enough. Five out of nine participants said their teachers could do some things differently to help them understand what they are teaching, and to help them succeed in their classes. These five participants gave multiple suggestions for what their teachers could do differently. With regard to changes the participants would make to improve the school if they were the principal, five out of nine participants mentioned specific suggestions for helping international students improve their English language ability. Finally, while all nine of the participants said their teachers had some understanding of the Chinese culture, none of the participants said their teachers understood the Chinese language.

### **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings suggest that the variety of challenges identified by the Chinese international secondary students who were in their first year of study at this suburban California private school will require the implementation of various kinds of supports that should be altered or offered to its international students in order for this private school to better serve these students in the future. The similarity of these challenges with those that international students and ELL's experience in mainstream classes in other U.S. public and private secondary schools, as described in current research literature, adds further credence to this study.

A comparison of the findings from this study to previous findings from the literature indicates that there are still gaps in the research: the needs of first-year Chinese international students who come to study at suburban California private schools and the needs of the teachers who teach them have not been properly addressed. Therefore, there is a need for change within the current educational model for first-year Chinese international students at suburban California private schools.

The participants in this study provided many suggestions for improving the current program for international students at this particular private school, which they feel would lead to a successful experience for them overall in their first year at this school:

- The school should plan strategically to offer classes that would specifically support the international students' need for improving their English skills, even if it means starting school at an earlier time to accommodate such classes.
- The school should remove or improve current classes that are viewed as barriers to the academic achievement of Chinese international students during their first year: namely, Logic and Study Hall.



- The school should teach study skills and socio-cultural skills to Chinese international students, in addition to English language skills and mainstream course content.
- The school's administration (e.g. the principal) should engage in regular conversation with Chinese students and develop positive relationships with them.
- The teachers could do some things differently to help Chinese international students understand and succeed in mainstream classes: namely, improve their delivery of content to make their classes more comprehensible, and provide more time in class for students to start the work and apply their understanding of teachers' expectations for classwork and homework.

### **Recommendations**

Because private schools are directly accountable to students and their parents or guardians based on the private school enrollment contract, and are not subject to the California Department of Education and most state regulations, private schools who enroll international students should make it a priority to ensure that all of the teachers they employ have an understanding of how the language acquisition process works and possess the pedagogical skills necessary to make the content of their mainstream courses comprehensible for international students. In addition, private schools should provide on-going professional development with a dual emphasis: training teachers in how to provide culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and how to teach both language and content simultaneously.

Private secondary schools should offer ELD classes to both middle school and high school international students, in addition to mainstream classes. As both this study and the research has shown, international students experience many challenges in mainstream classes and need to continue to learn basic English skills while they are enrolled in U.S. schools. ELD

classes are designed to boost students' English language skills, helping them to be more successful in their mainstream content classes, and build student confidence. Research shows that schools which provide ELD classes are more effective across the board.

Private secondary schools should carefully consider the course requirements for the first-year international students they are enrolling from the perspective of both language and content, and either remove or improve classes that are not needed in order to maximize the time international students spend in school. The researcher agrees with the participants' suggestions to remove Logic class as a requirement for incoming ninth grade international students at the suburban California private school in this study, and provide an ELD class for international students in place of Study Hall so that these students can have the opportunity to study basic English to improve their overall language skills.

Private secondary schools should provide funding for teachers to learn a second language [e.g. Mandarin Chinese] in order to experience the challenges of second-language acquisition first-hand, and/or travel overseas to a non-English speaking country. Research shows that teachers who previously took a foreign language course or multicultural education course or who lived or taught outside of the United States are more likely to demonstrate positive attitudes toward teaching ELL and international students.

Mainstream teachers in private secondary schools should incorporate specific English language acquisition targets, or ELD standards, in their lessons and units so that all content-area teachers in the school, not just ELD teachers, are teaching language and content simultaneously. Research shows that this practice allows international students and ELL's to continue learning content as they develop their second language.

Mainstream teachers in private secondary schools should reflect on their delivery of content and check in with international students often to make sure that the content of their courses is comprehensible to these students. Teachers should also be aware that international students and ELL's need more time to comprehend directions and complete classwork and homework, and that time constraints can be overwhelming for them. In addition, mainstream teachers in private secondary schools should continue to maintain high expectations for international students, provide scaffolding for them based on Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development*, and make appropriate accommodations for them on assignments, quizzes, and tests.

Finally, private schools should provide school-wide opportunities for international students and local students to collaborate on projects and participate in joint activities that will foster supportive relationships. Cross-cultural training for local students could be offered, via a cross-cultural communication course or immersion experience in another country which speaks a national language other than English, so that local students can relate to the international students' challenges of studying in a foreign culture.

### **Limitations/Gaps in the Research**

Although this study is supported by current research and provides valuable implications for further research, it is not without limitations. This study is limited by the sample size, which included only nine participants: eight of whom were in high school, and only one in middle school. The sample did not contain an equal ratio of middle school students to high school students, and therefore cannot be construed as a representative sample of Chinese international secondary students. The researcher works at the site where the research was conducted, and has a personal relationship with each of the Chinese international students at the middle/high school campus in her position as International Student Advocate; in addition, the researcher is the

mainstream English teacher of the one middle school international student in the research study. Thus, the prior connections of the researcher to the participants could have altered the responses of the participants.

Finally, the study was only conducted in one California suburban private school and may not be applicable to other California suburban private schools or suburban private schools in other U.S. states. While this study may add to the scarce, but existent body of scholarship illuminating the challenges of first-year mainland Chinese international secondary students in suburban California private schools, it cannot and should not be generalized to address the needs of every suburban private school in California or the United States which possesses an international student program.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Despite its limitations, this study provides several important implications for future research. As the mainland Chinese international student population in California and U.S. urban and suburban private secondary schools continues to grow, it is imperative that additional research be conducted in this area. In addition to further study of the challenges that mainland Chinese international secondary students face during their first year of study in urban and suburban California and U.S. private schools, researchers should also examine these challenges through the eyes of teachers, school administrators, and the legal guardians of the international students to gain an alternate perspective.

Because teachers in private schools may, but are not required to, hold credentials from the state of California and may hold credentials from other states and/or varying other certifications and degrees, researchers should also study the level of previous training and cross-cultural experience [e.g. living or teaching overseas and/or studying a second language] of

teachers who teach international students in California suburban private schools to help such schools determine factors for improving their international student programs.

While this study focused mainly on the responses of mainland Chinese international high school participants, expansion and replication of this study with a mainland Chinese international middle school participant sample could produce conclusions pertaining to the distinctive needs of that particular age group which may differ from those produced by this study.

Finally, researchers should study suburban private secondary schools in California and other states which have created successful programs for educating first-year mainland Chinese international students. Identifying the characteristics of such programs would greatly benefit the suburban California private school in this study, as well as other private schools in California and throughout the United States.

### **Overall Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to the existent literature about the challenges that international secondary students, particularly those from mainland China, experience during their first year attending a suburban California private school. It identifies the factors that the students themselves perceive as being challenging, and presents solutions for improvement from the perspective of these same students. That the research site was a private school in a suburban neighborhood is significant; private schools in suburban areas are less common in research literature, but are becoming a more common destination for international students, according to the research.

This study illuminates the need for mainstream teachers to possess knowledge and training in second-language acquisition, apply methods for teaching both language and content simultaneously, and provide adequate scaffolding and accommodations for the international

students in their classes while being cognizant that current research reflects the fact that mainstream teachers do not always possess this type of knowledge and training. Finally, this study highlights the need for future studies to be conducted of what characteristics make up a quality program for mainland Chinese international students in suburban California or U.S. private schools during their first year of study.

### References

- Berg, B.L. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Bodycott, P. (2012). Embedded culture and intercultural adaptation: implications for managing the needs of Chinese students. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 34 (4), 355-364.
- Bruner, J. (1978). "The role of dialogue in language acquisition." In *The Child's Conception of Language*, ed. A. Sinclair, R. Jarvella, & W. Levelt. New York, NY: Springer-Verlag.
- California Subject Examinations for Teachers (2013). CSET Test Guide: English Language Development General Examination Information. *Pearson Education, Inc.*, Retrieved from [http://www.ctcexams.nesinc.com/PDF/CSET\\_Prep/CS\\_ELD\\_geninfo.pdf](http://www.ctcexams.nesinc.com/PDF/CSET_Prep/CS_ELD_geninfo.pdf)
- California Department of Education (2016, May 24). Private schools frequently asked questions: What is a private school? Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ps/psfaq.asp#a1>
- Check & Schutt (2012). *Research methods in education*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Clair, N. (1995). Mainstream classroom teachers and ESL students. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29 (1), 189-196.
- Collier, V.P. (1987). Age and rate of acquisition of second language for academic purposes. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21, 617-641.
- Collier, V.P. (1989). How long? A synthesis of research on academic achievement in a second language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23, 509-531.
- Collier, V.P., & Thomas, W.P. (1989). How quickly can immigrants become proficient in school English? *Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, 5, 26-38.

- Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cummins, J. (1979). Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters: Working papers on bilingualism, no. 19. *Bilingual Education Project, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education*, pp. 121-129.
- Cummins, J. (1981). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework* (pp. 3-49). Los Angeles: California State University, Evaluation, Dissemination, and Assessment Center.
- Diaz-Rico, L.T. & Weed, K.Z. (2006). *The crosscultural, language, and academic development handbook: a complete K-12 reference guide*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Faltis, C.J. & Wolfe, P.M. (1999). *So much to say: Adolescents, bilingualism, and ESL in the secondary school*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Farrugia, C. (2014). Charting new pathways to higher education: International secondary students in the United States. *Center for Academic Mobility Research Institute of International Education*.
- Francis, D.J., Rivera, M., Lesaux, N., Kieffer, M., & Rivera, H. (2006). Practical guidelines for the education of English language learners: Research-based recommendations for serving adolescent newcomers. *Center on Instruction*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/lep-partnership/newcomers.pdf>



- Gibbons, P. (2002). *Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning: Teaching second language learners in the mainstream classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Harklau, L. (1994). The ESL learning environment in secondary school. In *So much to say: Adolescents, bilingualism, and ESL in the secondary school* (pp. 42-60). New York, NY: Teacher's College Press.
- Heinle Cengage Learning (2009). *Milestones assessment book: Milestones placement test*. Boston, MA: Heinle.
- Howard, G. (2006). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Ingerson, T. (2011). *Helping ELLs achieve success (passing grades) in the mainstream classroom*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED518704)
- Krashen, S., & Biber, D. (1988). *On course: Bilingual education's success in California*. Sacramento, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.
- Lee, S.J. (2012). New talk about ELL students: Culturally responsive schooling can and does help immigrant English learners succeed in school while learning the language. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 93, 66-69.
- Long, S.L. (2008). Examining the learning experiences of secondary non-English speaking background students in the mainstream English classroom: Informing teaching practice for improved educational outcomes. *The International Journal of Learning*, 15 (6), 263-270.
- Lu, A. & Jackson, M. (2012, February 13). Coming to America. *World News Group*. Retrieved from [https://world.wng.org/2012/02/coming\\_to\\_america](https://world.wng.org/2012/02/coming_to_america)
- Miller, P.C. & Endo, H. (2003). What about the immigrant students?: Problems they face in

- school and assistance teachers can give. *Electronic Magazine of Multicultural Education*, 5 (2), 1-12. Retrieved from [http://www.researchgate.net/publication/292400419\\_What\\_about\\_the\\_immigrant\\_students\\_Problems\\_they\\_face\\_in\\_school\\_and\\_assistance\\_teachers\\_can\\_give](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/292400419_What_about_the_immigrant_students_Problems_they_face_in_school_and_assistance_teachers_can_give)
- Milnes, T. & Cheng, L. (2008). Teachers' assessment of ESL students in mainstream classes: challenges, strategies, and decision-making. *TESL Canada Journal*, 25 (2), 49-65.
- Nieto, S. & Bode, P. (2012). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Page, A. (2013, July). *The History of Rotary Youth Exchange*. Presentation at the 2013 Youth Exchange Officers Preconvention Meeting, Lisbon, Portugal. Retrieved from [http://www.slideshare.net/Rotary\\_International/history-of-rotary-youth-exchange](http://www.slideshare.net/Rotary_International/history-of-rotary-youth-exchange).
- Paris, D. & Winn, M.T. (2014). *Humanizing research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Peercy, M.M. (2011). Preparing English language learners for the mainstream: Academic language and literacy practices in two junior high school ESL classrooms. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 27, 324-362. doi:10.1080/10573569.2011.596105
- Pu, C. (2010). Rethinking literacy instruction to non-LEP/ESL-labeled language minority students. *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 15 (1 & 2), 137-155.
- Reeves, J. (2006). Secondary teacher attitudes toward including English-language learners in mainstream classrooms. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 99 (3), 131-142. (4397), 25-27.

- Romanowski, M.H. (2006). A changing nation: Issues facing Chinese teachers. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 42 (2), 76-81.
- Shih, S. (2015). An examination of academic coping among Taiwanese adolescents. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 108 (3). 175-185.  
doi:10.1080/00220671.2013.867473
- Short, D. (1991). *How to integrate language and content instruction: A training manual*. Washington D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED305824.pdf>
- Soong, G. (2011, November 24). Students suffer from excess academic stress. *The China Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/2011/11/24/323892/Students-suffer.html>
- State of California Department of Developmental Services (2014, December 17). Departmental policy statement. Retrieved from <http://dds.ca.gov/BilingualServices/>
- U.S. Department of Education (2015, October 15). Developing programs for English language learners: Glossary. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ell/glossary.html>
- U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement (2015, August). *Student and exchange visitor information system: General Summary Quarterly Review*. Retrieved from [http://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/report/2015/sevis\\_bythenumbers\\_aug15.pdf](http://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/report/2015/sevis_bythenumbers_aug15.pdf)
- Villegas, A., & Lucas, T. (2002). Preparing culturally responsive teachers: Rethinking the curriculum. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53, 20-32.

- Williams, J.A. (2001). Classroom conversations: Opportunities to learn for ESL students in mainstream classrooms. *The Reading Teacher*, 54 (8). 750-757.
- Winter, C. (2014). U.S. private schools are looking East. *Business Week*, 00077135 (4397), 25-27.
- Yang, C., Bear, G.G, Chen, F.F, Blank, J.C., Zhang, W., & Huang, X. (2013). Students' perceptions of school climate in the U.S. and China. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 28 (1). 7-24. doi:10.1037/spq0000002
- Yin, L. (2013). Coming to America for spiritual or academic growth? Experiences of international students at one Christian school. *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 22, 139-152. doi:10.1080/10656219.2013.808975
- Youngs, C. S. & Youngs, Jr., G. A. (2001). Predictors of mainstream teachers' attitudes toward ESL students. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35 (1), 97-120.

## Appendix A



### PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM FOR USING SUBURBAN CALIFORNIA PRIVATE SCHOOL IN A RESEARCH STUDY

#### Challenges Facing Mandarin-speaking Mainland Chinese International Students In Their First Year of Study in a Suburban California Private School

Shelby Bumgarner

#### **Purpose and Background**

Shelby Bumgarner, researcher and graduate student in the School of Education and Counseling Psychology at Dominican University of California, is conducting a study on challenges facing Mandarin-speaking mainland Chinese international students in their first year attending a suburban California private school.

#### **Procedures**

The researcher will conduct personal interviews with first-year international secondary students with a translator present. The purpose of the personal interviews is for the researcher to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of Mandarin-speaking mainland Chinese international students during their first year attending a suburban California private school, and the challenges they face in their learning.

#### **Risks and/or discomforts**

Records from this research study will be kept as confidential as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from this study. All personal references and identifying information will be eliminated when the data are transcribed, and all names of participants will be changed, thereby assuring confidentiality regarding the participant's responses. Participant identity will be kept in a separate file from their surveys, and focus group/personal interview transcripts will use a pseudonym for identification. The master list for these pseudonyms will be kept by Mrs. Bumgarner in a locked file, separate from the transcripts. One year after the completion of the research, all written and recorded materials will be destroyed.

#### **Benefits**

There is no direct benefit to any teacher or international student from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the challenges that Mandarin-speaking, mainland Chinese international students face in their first year attending a suburban California private school.

#### **Costs/Financial Considerations**

There will be no costs to teachers or international students as a result of taking part in this study.

#### **Questions**

If I have any further questions or comments about my school's participation in this study, I should first talk with the researcher. I may contact Mrs. Bumgarner at (415) 304-2371 or e-mail her at [shelby.bumgarner@students.dominican.edu](mailto:shelby.bumgarner@students.dominican.edu). I may also contact Dr. Elizabeth Truesdell, supervising professor, at (415) 257-0186 or e-mail her at [elizabeth.truesdell@dominican.edu](mailto:elizabeth.truesdell@dominican.edu). I may contact the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS Office by calling (415) 482-3547 and leaving a voicemail message, by FAX at (415) 257-0165 or by writing to the IRBPHS, Office of the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dominican University of California, 50 Acacia Avenue, San Rafael, CA 94901.

#### **Consent**

I have been given a copy of this consent form, signed and dated, to keep. PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to have my school participate in this study, or to withdraw my school from it at any point. My signature below indicates that I agree to allow my school, including its current international students in their first year of attendance at this school, to participate in this research study.

Signature of Head of School

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B**



**CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR TRANSLATOR  
TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

Challenges Facing Mandarin-speaking Mainland Chinese International Students  
In Their First Year of Study in a Suburban California Private School

**Shelby Bumgarner**

Dear Translator,

My name is Mrs. Shelby Bumgarner, and I am a Graduate Student at Dominican University of California in San Rafael. I am doing a research study on challenges facing Mandarin-speaking, mainland Chinese international students who are in their first year attending a suburban California private school. I am interested in learning about the experiences of these students in a private school and the challenges they are currently facing in this private school.

For this research study, I will conduct personal interviews with Mandarin-speaking, mainland Chinese international students who are in their first year attending a suburban California private school. I will ask you, a Mandarin/English translator, to be present during the interviews. By signing this form, you will agree to maintain the students' confidentiality. The purpose of the personal interviews is for me to acquire a more in-depth understanding of their experiences during their first year attending a suburban private school in California. By signing this form, you will allow me to audio record your participation in personal interviews. All of my notes from transcribing the personal interviews will only be used for my study's purposes. Pseudonyms will be used when writing reports. You do not have to participate if you don't want to. You can stop at any time, also. There are no penalties if you decide not to give assent.

Thank you,  
Mrs. Bumgarner

Please check or "x" one of the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ I give assent to participate in personal interviews as a translator and to maintain confidentiality.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give assent to participate in personal interviews as a translator and to maintain confidentiality.

Translator's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Translator's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Appendix C**



**LEGAL GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION  
AND  
INFORMED ASSENT FOR STUDENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY  
Challenges Facing Mandarin-speaking Mainland Chinese International Students  
In Their First Year of Study in a Suburban California Private School**

**Shelby Bumgarner**

**Purpose and Background**

Shelby Bumgarner, researcher and graduate student in the School of Education and Counseling Psychology at Dominican University of California, is conducting a study on challenges facing Mandarin-speaking mainland Chinese international students in their first year attending a suburban California private school.

**Procedures**

The researcher will conduct personal interviews with first-year international students with a translator present. The purpose of the personal interviews is for the researcher to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of Mandarin-speaking mainland Chinese international students during their first year attending a suburban California private school, and the challenges they face in their learning.

**Risks and/or discomforts**

Records from this research study will be kept as confidential as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from this study. All personal references and identifying information will be eliminated when the data are transcribed, and all names of participants will be changed, thereby assuring confidentiality regarding the participant’s responses. Participant identity will be kept in a separate file from their surveys, and personal interview transcripts will use a pseudonym for identification. The master list for these pseudonyms will be kept by Mrs. Bumgarner in a locked file, separate from the transcripts. One year after the completion of the research, all written and recorded materials will be destroyed.

**Benefits**

There is no direct benefit to any international student from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the challenges that Mandarin-speaking, mainland Chinese international students face in their first year attending a suburban California private school.

**Costs/Financial Considerations**

There will be no costs to any international student as a result of taking part in this study.

**Questions**

If I have any further questions or comments about my student’s participation in this study, I should first talk with the researcher. I may contact Mrs. Bumgarner at (415) 304-2371 or e-mail her at [shelby.bumgarner@students.dominican.edu](mailto:shelby.bumgarner@students.dominican.edu). I may also contact Dr. Elizabeth Truesdell, supervising professor, at (415) 257-0186 or e-mail her at [elizabeth.truesdell@dominican.edu](mailto:elizabeth.truesdell@dominican.edu). I may contact the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS Office by calling (415) 482-3547 and leaving a voicemail message, by FAX at (415) 257-0165 or by writing to the IRBPHS, Office of the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dominican University of California, 50 Acacia Avenue, San Rafael, CA 94901.

**Consent/Assent**

I have been given a copy of this consent/assent form, signed and dated, to keep. PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to have my international student participate in this study, or to withdraw my student from it at any point. My international student is free to decline to participate in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to have my student participate in this study will have no influence on my student’s present or future status in school, and my student’s decision to participate in this study will have no influence on his/her present or future status in school. My signature below indicates that I agree to allow my student to participate in this study.

Signature of International Student’s Legal Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of International Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Person Obtaining Consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D



**INFORMED ASSENT FOR STUDENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**  
**学生参与调查研究知情同意书**

**Challenges Facing Mandarin-speaking Mainland Chinese International Students**  
**In Their First Year of Study in a Suburban California Private School**

**Shelby Bumgarner**

Dear Student,

My name is Mrs. Shelby Bumgarner, and I am a Graduate Student at Dominican University of California in San Rafael. I am doing a research study on challenges facing Mandarin-speaking, mainland Chinese international students who are in their first year attending a suburban California private school. I am interested in learning about the experiences of these students in a private school and the challenges they are currently facing in this private school.

我是 Mrs. Shelby G. Bumgarner, 我在 Dominican University of California in San Rafael 读研究生。我正在从事研究第一次从大陆来加州非城市地区读私立学校的留学生可能会面临的挑战。我很想了解这些学生在学校中的经历和他们现在在学校中所面临的挑战。

For this research study, I will conduct a personal interview with you. A Mandarin-speaking translator will be present during the interview. The translator has agreed to maintain your confidentiality. The purpose of the personal interview is for me to acquire a more in-depth understanding of your experiences during your first year attending a suburban private school in California. By signing this form, you will allow me to audio record your participation in a personal interview. All of my notes from transcribing the personal interview will only be used for my study's purposes. Pseudonyms will be used when writing reports. You do not have to participate if you don't want to. You can stop at any time, also. There are no penalties if you decide not to give assent.

为了这项研究, 我会与你进行个人面试。在面试过程中会有说汉语的翻译人员出席。翻译人员已同意保持内容保密。这次面试的目的是为了让我能够对你的生活和经历有更加深入的了解。通过签署此表格, 你将授权我录音你的个人面试。所有的记录将仅用于我的学习和研究, 撰写论文时我会使用化名。你将不会被强迫参与这次面试。同时, 如果你同意配合研究学习, 你也有权可以终止一切活动。如果你不同意参与研究, 这不会影响你的正常学习生活。

Thank you,

Mrs. Bumgarner

谢谢,

Mrs. Bumgarner

Please check or "x" one of the following:

请在下面空格中的一个打 "x"

\_\_\_\_\_ I give assent to participate in a personal interview with the researcher and a translator present.

我同意与研究者进行个人面试。

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give assent to participate in personal interview with the researcher and a translator present. 我不同意与研究者进行个人面试。

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

学生姓名

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

学生签名

日期

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

研究人员签名

日期

*School of Education and Counseling Psychology – 50 Acacia Avenue, San Rafael, California 94901-2298*

*p. 415-482-2462 – f. 415-458-3790 – [www.dominican.edu](http://www.dominican.edu)*



**Appendix E**

March 28, 2016

Shelby Bumgarner  
50 Acacia Ave.  
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Shelby:

I have reviewed your proposal entitled Challenges Facing Mandarin-Speaking, Mainland Chinese International Students in their First Year Attending a Suburban California Private School submitted to the Dominican University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRBPHP Application, #10429). I am approving it as having met the requirements for minimizing risk and protecting the rights of the participants in your research.

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,



Martha Nelson, Ph.D.

Chair, IRBPHP

cc: Elizabeth Truesdell