

Situating Student Approaches to Learning English in a Chinese Context: A Re-interpretation of Two Tertiary Vocational Learners' Experiences

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Contributions to the growing literature on Chinese students' approaches to learning English have emphasized either the influence of macro contextual factors on a characteristically Chinese approach or the ways in which interactions between learner agency and micro contextual factors lead to a diversity of approaches. This paper makes use of biographical interviews supplemented by secondary data in an attempt to account for the development in contextual terms of the approaches to learning English of two Chinese vocational students. Highlighting the roles of both macro and micro contextual factors in the development of their approaches, we argue for greater attention in research to students' orientations towards contextual factors and to the ways in which contextual influences are mediated through individual experiences.

Introduction

The growing number of Chinese students learning English in China and studying through the medium of English overseas has led to increased interest in Chinese students' approaches to learning. In one strand of the literature, rote memorization, reliance on effort, deference to teacher authority, and reticence in the classroom are elements of a characteristically Chinese approach to learning influenced by Confucian cultural values and educational structures (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hu, 2002, 2005;