

ECDE7020 Research Proposal

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Start Date	01/10/2024	End Date	01/10/2027

PhD by Research	PhD Practice Based	PhD by Published Works	Professional Doctorate (including DBA, DProf, Ed D)	MPhil by Research	MPhil Practice Based
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MA by Research	MSc by Research	MRes			
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Proposed Research

Proposed Research Question and sub-questions (if appropriate):
Main Research Question: Factors influencing Chinese students' academic achievements in UK: English language proficiency and culture integration Sub-questions: RQ1: What are the primary academic, social, and cultural challenges encountered by Chinese international students within the UK higher education system? RQ2: What adaptive strategies do Chinese international students employ to navigate and overcome academic challenges in UK universities? RQ3: How does the process of intercultural adaptation in the UK shape psychological, social, and academic transformations among Chinese international students
Background & Context (approx. 500 words)
The growing number of Chinese students pursuing higher education in the United Kingdom has highlighted the need to better understand the challenges they encounter in

attaining academic success. Their performance in UK institutions is shaped by two interconnected factors: English language proficiency and cultural integration (Wong, 2018). While existing research often investigates these challenges among international students more broadly or excludes Chinese learners from analysis, this study focuses specifically on how linguistic competence and cultural adaptation jointly impact the academic achievements of Chinese students.

While existing research often examines these factors across a broad spectrum of international students or excludes Chinese students altogether, this study specifically explores how linguistic competence and cultural adaptation together impact the academic achievements of Chinese students. There are some researchers have done some studies in this filed. For example, from language proficiency aspect there are some researchers such as Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi (2015) directly highlight the critical role of English proficiency in academic success. Ece & Inegbedion (2015) and Li (2019) also touch on language as a foundational factor affecting academic integration and performance. Taylor & Ali (2017) link language barriers to socio-cultural challenges that indirectly impact learning.

From Culture integration aspect, Taylor & Ali (2017) emphasize how cultural adjustment (e.g., understanding norms, building social networks) influences meaningful learning and assimilation and Ece & Inegbedion (2015) and Li (2019) suggest that overcoming cultural dissonance is key to academic integration and performance.

Under the above theoretical guidance and frameworks, this research will focus on two key factors influencing their academic performance: English language proficiency and cultural integration.

To assess language proficiency, this research will use IELTS score bands, as the IELTS exam is a globally recognized measure of English ability, evaluating students' skills in speaking, writing, listening, and reading (IELTS, 2024).

Regarding cultural integration, previous research by Isobel Kai-Hui Wang (2018) on Chinese students' transitional experiences in UK higher education identified academic, psychological, and social difficulties as major challenges during their initial adjustment period. Cultural differences further compound these difficulties for both undergraduate

and postgraduate students. Additionally, Bianchi and Martini (2023) emphasized that social integration plays a critical role in the well-being of international students. Therefore, cultural integration will be the second factor examined in this study.

This research will adopt a mixed-methods approach, gathering data from a Chinese IELTS training center, where students prepare for the exam to meet university entry requirements. A longitudinal study will then be conducted over four months, tracking students' progress through their first academic term, a period that often coincides with cultural shock. Academic performance will be assessed using the students' average grade point from their first term's achievements.

Aims & Objectives (approx. 250-500 words)

The primary aim of this research is to identify and analyze the academic, cultural, and institutional factors that influence the academic performance of Chinese international students in UK higher education. With the increasing number of Chinese students pursuing higher education in the UK, it is crucial to examine the challenges they face and the support mechanisms that can enhance their academic success. This study will explore the interplay between English language proficiency, cultural adaptation, and institutional support systems in shaping their educational experiences.

To achieve this aim, the study will focus on the following key objectives:

- **Examine the Impact of English Language Proficiency**

Investigate how variations in English language proficiency affect academic performance. Analyze the role of IELTS scores as a predictor of success in UK universities. Explore students' experiences with language barriers in academic settings, including lectures, assessments, and group work.

- **Assess the Role of Cultural Integration**

Identify the cultural challenges Chinese students face when adapting to UK academic norms, including critical thinking, independent learning, and classroom participation. Examine the influence of social integration on students' overall academic and

psychological well-being. Assess how cultural differences in communication styles and learning approaches impact academic performance.

- **Evaluate Institutional Support Mechanisms**

Investigate the effectiveness of university-provided support services, such as academic writing centres, language courses, and student mentoring programs. Assess the role of faculty and peer support in helping students navigate the academic transition. Identify best practices in UK higher education institutions that successfully support Chinese students' academic integration.

By analyzing the research questions, this research aims to provide actionable insights for UK universities to optimize support structures, pedagogical strategies, and intercultural engagement initiatives. The study will highlight areas where institutions can enhance their services to foster better academic outcomes for Chinese students.

Ultimately, the findings will empower universities to create more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments. By implementing targeted interventions, UK higher education institutions can improve the overall educational experience for Chinese international students, ensuring they feel academically and socially integrated. This research will contribute to ongoing discussions on international student support and offer practical recommendations to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps in higher education.

Proposed Plan of Work

Planned development	Target date for completion
Reading and writing of introduction and literature review	20/10/2025
Reading and writing of methodology chapter	18/02/2026
Piloting research tools	18/06/2026
Collecting data	18/01/2027
Analysing data	18/04/2027
Writing up of results	18/09/2027
Writing conclusions	18/10/2027

Proposed Methodology (approx. 500 words)

Philosophical Foundations of the Study

Understanding the key philosophical concepts that underpin this research—epistemology, ontology, axiology, and methodology—is essential. Crotty (1998) asserts that ontology serves as the foundation of a study, defining the nature of reality. Strantakeos (2014) describes ontology as the "science of being," outlining different perspectives on reality.

Reichardt and Cook (1979) argue that different philosophical paradigms and methodologies can coexist. Pragmatism, a flexible approach that allows researchers to select methods best suited to addressing research questions, is particularly relevant to this study. By prioritizing practical solutions to real-world problems, pragmatism provides an objective framework for analyzing students' perspectives.

Research Methodology: A Mixed-Methods Approach

Given this philosophical foundation, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Creswell (2005) emphasizes that combining these methods offers a more comprehensive understanding of complex research problems. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), the integration of qualitative and quantitative data enhances the depth of analysis, enabling researchers to capture a more holistic picture of the subject under investigation.

Longitudinal Research Approach

A longitudinal research design will be employed in this study, as it is widely used in both quantitative and qualitative research. Menard (2002) defines longitudinal research as a method that collects data over two or more time periods, enabling the analysis of trends and changes over time. While this approach is commonly used in medical studies to track patient symptoms, it has gained traction in business and social sciences to examine evolving trends and behavioral patterns.

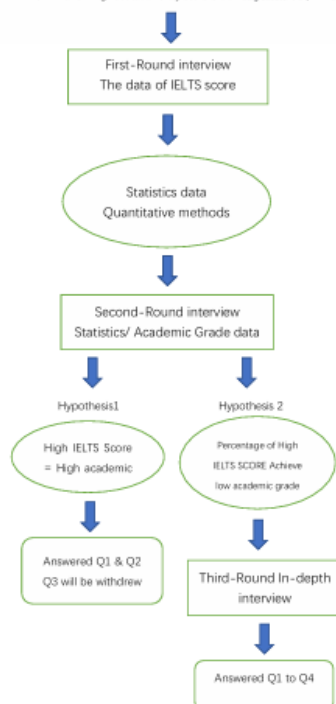
The rationale for using a longitudinal approach in this study is closely tied to its scope and duration. Since the research spans more than three months, it is crucial to conduct two rounds of interviews: the first upon students' arrival in the UK and the second after they have experienced cultural adjustment and completed their first academic term. The second round will focus on their cultural experiences and academic performance.

Research Design

This study will employ a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection. The qualitative component will consist of longitudinal semi-structured interviews conducted over two phases within a four-month period. The process is illustrated as below:

The total Number of students	IELTS Score Band			
	6.0	6.5	7.0	7.5

* The Minimal UK High education entry score is 6.0. Postgraduate: 6.5 (minimum 6.0 in each component)



Research Tools

In this research the following research tools will be used to collect research data. The tools for this research will be semi-structured questionnaires and interviews, the questionnaire will be carefully designed with valid questions and will had a simple group to test the questionnaire first. All the questions will be structured in both in English and Chinese languages.

Data Collection and Analysis

This research will collect and analyze two types of data: quantitative and qualitative.

Qualitative Data Analysis

For qualitative data, Framework Analysis will be employed. According to Lacey and Luff (2007), Framework Analysis consists of five key stages will used: Familiarization, Identifying a thematic framework, Indexing, Charting, Mapping and Interpretation.

The qualitative data in this study will be collected through tape-recorded interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses. All recorded interviews and handwritten responses will be transcribed. Once transcribed, the data will be systematically organized into retrievable sections and coded. The use of coding numbers will facilitate easy reference to the original material when needed.

After coding, **NVivo**, one of the world's leading qualitative data analysis software, will be used to analyze the data. This software allows for efficient data organization, thematic exploration, and deeper interpretation of qualitative findings.

Quantitative Data Analysis

For the analysis of quantitative data, statistical methods will be applied using specialized computer programs. Commonly used statistical software includes SPSS, SAS, Minitab, and others. These tools will be utilized to conduct data processing, statistical analysis, and interpretation of numerical results.

By using a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis methods, this research aims to provide a comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of the research problem.

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