Exploring Chinese English Major Students' Motivation And Perezhivanie In Pursuing Graduate Programs

Yalan Li

(School Of Foreign Languages And Literature, Wuhan University, China)

Abstract:

With the expansion of higher education, pursuing graduate studies has become a mainstream choice, yet research on undergraduate-to-graduate transition motivations remains limited. Existing studies predominantly focus on causal mechanisms, whereas this research employs Vygotsky's concept of perezhivanie to establish a dynamic paradigm examining cognition-emotion integration. This mixed-methods study investigates motivation and emotional experiences among three English major groups: entrance examination group, recommended admission group, and study-abroad group. An explanatory sequential design was implemented with 88 third- and fourth-year students from a 985 Project university. Quantitative data from an adapted Academic Motivation Scale underwent reliability/validity tests, exploratory factor analysis, and ANOVA; qualitative data from six semi-structured interviews were thematically analyzed using Delve. Key findings revealed no significant inter-group motivational differences, though recommended admission group students demonstrated higher peer-influence susceptibility. Distinct motivational profiles emerged: recommended admission group prioritized achievement/family expectations, study-abroad group exhibited heterogeneous motivations, and entrance examination group emphasized career advancement. Crucially, qualitative analysis positioned the decision to further education as a cognitive-affective complex– integrating rational calculus with lived experience (perezhivanie). While single-institution sampling limits generalizability, the results offer valuable insights into talent cultivation for understanding differential motivation in homogeneous environments. Future research should expand samples and employ longitudinal triangulation.

Keyword: *English majors; further educational motivation; perezhivanie; explanatory sequential mixed method*

I. Introduction

Background

In 2021, the Ministry of Education issued a notification to "expand the scale of graduate student enrollment", planning to increase the number of graduate students by over 20%, resulting in a total enrollment exceeding 1.1 million students. The report from the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2022 proposed the goal of building a strong educational nation by 2035. In December 2024, the concept of the "Smart Education Era" was proposed at the Global MOOC and Online Education Conference (GMC) held in London, marking an important step towards the informatization of higher education. Against this backdrop, furthering one's studies has become an important choice for many undergraduate students.

In China, the main pathways for pursuing graduate studies include recommended admission, entrance examination, and studying abroad. Figure 1-1 shows the data on whether undergraduate graduates of the English major at the School of Foreign Studies, Xi'an Jiaotong University, chose to pursue postgraduate studies domestically or overseas from 2021 to 2024. During the period from 2021 to 2024, the number of undergraduate graduates choosing to continue postgraduate studies showed an upward trend, increasing from 52.5% in 2021 to 68.4% in 2024. Among them, the proportion of those choosing domestic further-study (through recommendation for admission or entrance examinations) rose from 32.8% in 2021 to 43.9% in 2023, but slightly declined to 38.6% in 2024. During this period, the number of those choosing overseas further-study fluctuated, dropping from 19.7% in 2021 to 18.7% in 2023 and then rebounding to 29.8% in 2024.
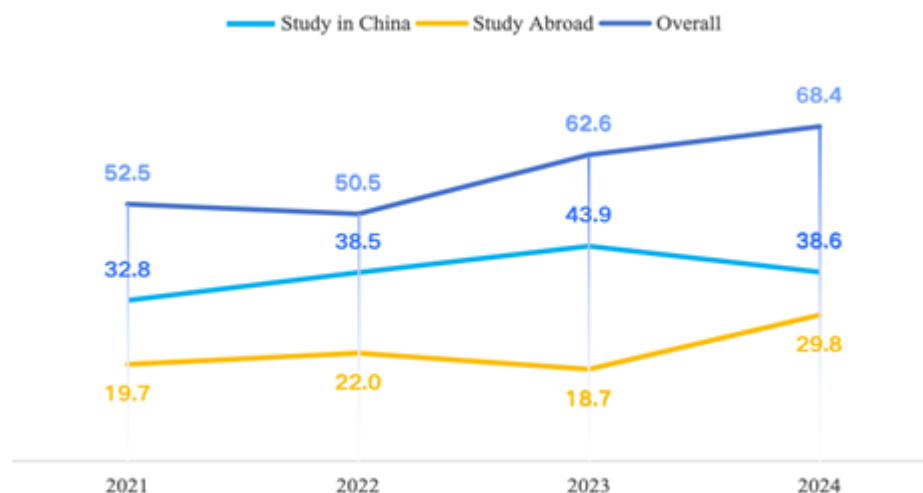
Study in China — Study Abroad — Overall

Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-1 The Number of Undergraduate Graduates from the School of Foreign Studies at XJTU Continuing Their Postgraduate Studies from 2021 to 2024

For undergraduate students in their third and fourth years, understanding the motivation that prompt them to choose different pathways of further education has become an important research field. This not only concerns the personal development of students but is also closely linked to the development of higher education and talent cultivation strategies at the national level, making it worthy of in-depth research and analysis.

Learning motivation refers to the motivation closely related to learning activities—it encompasses one or more factors that activate the intrinsic willingness to learn, trigger the setting of specific learning goals, and sustain actual learning behaviors. It reflects students' tendencies to seek the meaning and value of learning activities and to strive to obtain the anticipated academic value from them. Further educational motivation discussed in the thesis is a subset of learning motivation.

At present, academic research predominantly focuses on areas such as learning motivation, learning burnout, and educational satisfaction. In contrast, there are relatively few specialized studies on the further educational motivation from the undergraduate to the master's stage. Existing research on graduate student learning motivation, including pathways such as entrance exams, recommended admissions, and studying abroad, mainly concentrates on analyzing the causal mechanisms behind "social facts" and exploring the reasons for continuing education or structuring classifications of admission motivation.

Second language (L2) learning motivation is one of the most elusive concepts in second language acquisition (SLA) research, and its complexity and multi-faceted nature have often resulted in conflicting findings in the past. Despite the rich literature in the area, and due to the fact that different conceptualizations of L2 motivation, especially until the cognitive movement in 1990s, have generally been overshadowed by Gardner's classic concept of the integrative motive (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985), there has not been much space to integrate various facets of L2 motivation and other affective variables such as L2 anxiety into a coherent framework.

Emotions, on the other hand, are also important in the study of learner selves because conflicts and discrepancies within the self-concept lead to emotional states as well. As Markus and Nurius (1986) claim, "to the extent that individuals can or cannot achieve particular self-conceptions or identities, they will feel either positively or negatively about themselves" (p. 958). It is reasonable to assume that this is also the case in second language learning situations, and L2 self-discrepancies, as sources of motivation, can also lead to the arousal of emotional states like L2 anxiety in language learners. Therefore, viewing language learning from the self perspective may not only offer a better explanation of L2 learners' motivation, but can also provide insights into the sources of L2 anxiety, which is "a major obstacle to be overcome in learning another language" (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Purpose and Significance

Theoretically, this research aims to break free from the constraints of traditional educational motivation studies. To this end, it introduces the concept of "perezhivanie" from Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT). SCT views motivation as a social, interactive, mediated, and constantly evolving structure. The concept of "perezhivanie" further emphasizes that learners' motivation stems from their personal learning experiences and their interpretation of these experiences (Ng, 2022). This provides a fresh perspective for second language (L2) motivation research. By integrating "perezhivanie", this study aims to construct a dynamic research paradigm.

This paradigm will reveal dynamic systems through an emotional and cognitive interaction perspective, thereby providing an innovative theoretical perspective for understanding students' motivation for continuing education. Ultimately, it enriches the theoretical framework of educational motivation. Additionally, this study will affirm the importance of emotional experiences in the continuing education process of English major students. This will clarify how these experiences are influenced by social and cultural factors and, in turn, how they affect learning motivation. By doing so, it lays a theoretical foundation for future research. Overall, this study contributes to the empirical application of social cultural theory and the concept of "experience" in the field of educational motivation research.

Practically, by revealing the differences in educational motivation and emotional experiences among students who pursue further education through different pathways such as entrance examination, recommended admission, and studying abroad, this research will provide educators with detailed evidence. This will help provide students with precise and personalized support, increasing their chances of success in further education. Additionally, it will assist institutions in developing more targeted psychological counseling and career planning courses, designing courses that meet the needs of English major students, helping them cope with the pressure of further education, clarify their career directions, and promote their all-round development.

Research Question

This study aims to explore the complex landscape of Chinese English majors' pursuit of further education, with a specific focus on their motivations and emotional experiences. To achieve a comprehensive understanding, the following research questions have been formulated:

What are the key characteristics and differences in motivations (intrinsic and extrinsic) among Chinese English majors when selecting between the three pathways for further education: entrance exams, recommendation admission and studying abroad.

How do the emotional experiences (e.g.Excitement, Self-Affirmation, Escapism, Exhaustion) of Chinese English majors during their pursuit of further education relate to their underlying motivation and chosen pathways?

How do the interactions between motivations and emotional experiences influence students' persistence, adaptability, or decision-making outcomes across the three pathways?

II. Literature Review

Second Language (L2) Motivation

The term "motivation" is commonly defined as "the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity" (Gardner, 1985). Motivation is considered a crucial individual difference variable that determines the success of long-term second language (L2) learning. As a result, research on Second Language (L2) Motivation has emerged.

With the development of the times and the continuous progress of human thoughts and concepts, the L2 motivation theory has had different foci in different historical periods. From a temporal dimension, we have witnessed the continuous evolution and development of motivation theories with diverse concerns. It is noteworthy that these theories in various periods do not simply replace one another. Instead, new theories are developed through minor modifications and transformations based on the original ones.

Among the early and most representative and influential theories in the domain of second language (L2) acquisition is Motivation Theory (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). In this theory, Gardner proposed two concepts: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is characterized by a positive attitude towards the second-language community and a desire to interact with its members, and even a longing to become similar to them. It reflects a learner's inclination towards the cultural and social aspects of the target language group. In contrast, instrumental motivation is expounded from a utilitarian perspective. It is associated with the practical benefits that proficiency in a second language can bring. This type of motivation emphasizes the tangible returns and benefits that learning a second language can offer in real-life scenarios. Gardner's motivation theory has made a significant contribution to understanding the motivational factors of second language learners and has provided a fundamental framework for subsequent research in this field. Classic Achievement Motivation Theory (Atkinson, 1974) , despite being an early-stage theory, still wields significant influence to this day. Atkinson posited that achievement motivation can be bifurcated into two distinct types: the motivation to pursue success and the motivation to avoid failure. The former drives individuals to strive for accomplishments, while the latter prompts them to evade situations that may lead to failure.

Closely related to Atkinson's theory is the Expectancy-value Theory (Eccles et al, 1983). This theory posits that humans are innately curious learners with a natural desire to understand the external environment and take on challenges. The expectancy-value theory complements Atkinson's research by emphasizing the intrinsic motivation rooted in human nature, which coexists with the more extrinsically-oriented achievement-related motivation proposed by Atkinson.

Self-efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1977) pertains to individuals' judgments of their capabilities to execute specific tasks. Their sense of self-efficacy determines not only the choice of activities they engage in but also the amount of effort they exert and the degree of perseverance they demonstrate. Bandura posited that self-efficacy is determined by four factors. Firstly, prior experiences play a crucial role; past successes or failures in similar tasks shape one's perception of their ability. Secondly, vicarious learning, which involves learning by observing similar cases, influences self-efficacy. Thirdly, verbal encouragement from others can boost an individual's confidence in their capabilities. Finally, an individual's physiological state, such as anxiety levels, also impacts self-efficacy. High levels of anxiety might undermine one's belief in their ability to perform a task successfully.

The Self-determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) is one of the most influential theories in motivational psychology (Dörnyei, 2003). According to the theory, '[t]o be self-determining means to experience a sense of choice in initiating and regulating one's own actions'. This is referred to as autonomy. The theory distinguishes between two kinds of motivations: intrinsic and extrinsic. The first refers to an individual's motivation to perform a particular activity because of internal rewards such as joy, pleasure and satisfaction of curiosity. Whereas in extrinsic motivation the individual expects an extrinsic reward such as good grades or praise from others. In line with the notion of autonomy and intrinsic motivation, the self-determination theory offers a very interesting look at motivation by setting a different agenda for language teachers. Rather than focusing on how people (e.g. teachers in the classroom) can motivate others, the focus should be on 'how people can create the conditions within which others can motivate themselves'.

With the deepening understanding of motivation theories and the recognition of their dynamic nature, researchers began to incorporate the element of time. In 1998, Dörnyei and Otto (1998) proposed the Process Motivation Theory based on the synthesis of previous theories. This theory divides the formation of learning motivation into three sequential stages: the pre-action stage, the action stage, and the post-action stage. Each stage has its specific action sequence and corresponding influencing factors. The Process Motivation Theory model integrates multiple factors and previous theories such as attribution theory, self-efficacy theory, expectancy-value theory, and self-determination theory. It is an improvement and development based on previous research. However, this theory also has its own limitations. For instance, it divides an individual's behavior into three distinct stages. In real life, the boundaries between an individual's motivational behaviors are rather vague. In fact, various motivations of an individual are intertwined, and the same behavior may simultaneously belong to the pre-action stage, the action stage, or the post-action stage (史利红 & 张舍茹, 2015). Overall, although the process motivation theory has made significant contributions to the field of motivation research by considering the time dimension, its limitations also indicate that there is still room for further refinement and improvement in understanding the complexity of motivation.

Dörnyei (2005) introduced the Self-system Motivation Theory, approaching learning motivation from a novel perspective. Rooted in the "Possible Selves Theory" and "Self-discrepancy Theory" in social psychology (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986), this theory comprises three key components: the L2 ideal self, the L2 ought-to self, and L2 learning experiences. The L2 ideal self refers to the L2 proficiency level an individual hopes to achieve in the future. L2 ought-to self refers to the qualities and characteristics that an individual believes they should possess during the process of second language learning in order to meet expectations and avoid negative outcomes. The L2 learning experience focuses on the learner's current situation rather than their imagined future. It includes operational motivations related to the immediate environment, such as the influence of teachers, course design, peer groups, and past experiences of success or failure. These experiences can significantly shape the learner's current motivation level and their attitude towards second language learning. Dörnyei's self-system motivation theory enriches the understanding of second language motivation by integrating these different aspects related to the learner's self-concept and their real-time learning environment. Table 2-1 summarizes the key second language motivation theories mentioned above.

Flexible and effective frameworks have proven to help explain language learning motivation (Larsen-Freeman, 2019). Samad et al. (2012) utilized integrative andinstrumental theory, analyzing questionnaire data to examine the relationship between motivation and language proficiency in Iranian EFL learners studying at a Malaysian university. Dincer and Yesilyurt (2017) used self-determination theory to explore the relationships between EFL learners' motivation to speak, autonomous regulation, autonomy support from lecturers, and classroom engagement.

Based on Self-Determination Theory, the current research focuses on the further education motivation of Chinese English major students from intrinsic and extrinsic perspectives, especially the characteristics and differences in motivations when choosing different further education pathways.

Emotion and Perezhivanie

There are good reasons to be concerned with emotion as a core process that impacts almost everything we do (MacIntyre, P. D. & Vincze, L., 2017). All later experiences, including language development, are built on an emotional foundation and are fully integrated with it. Fundamentally, emotional responses are adaptive and

prompt people to strive to cope with the constantly changing situations in life. Positive emotions, especially negative ones like fear or anger, can completely dominate a person's conscious experience - they are hard to ignore (Reeve, 2015). Reeve defined Emotions as "short-lived, feeling-purposive-expressive-bodily responses that help us adapt to the opportunities and challenges we face during important life events".

The number of basic emotions has long concerned emotion theorists. Solomon (1980) recognized only two types, positive and negative. Izard (2007) proposed six basic emotions in his differential emotions theory: interest, joy/happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, and fear. Izard (2007) also raisied the idea that emotion schemas (not basic emotion per se), which is a mental structure to organize information and interpret events, constitute by far the most prominent source of human motivation. Although basic emotions have been found to be universal across cultures, the repertoire of emotional schemas can vary from person to person, depending on experience and the way one learns to distinguish between an emotion. In this way, emotions provide the basis for common/shared experiences as well as unique/individual emotional/motivational configurations (Ekman,1972).

Pekrun (2002), a German psychologist, took the lead in defining the concept of academic emotion. According to Pekrun's interpretation, academic emotion covers all kinds of emotional experiences closely related to learning in the whole process of teaching activities, including positive emotions such as pride, hope and relief brought by academic achievement and negative emotions such as tension, anger, anxiety and shame in examinations. Pekrun's contribution is particularly significant because he broke through the limitation of previous studies that ignored positive emotions, comprehensively revealed the multidimensionality and wide range of academic emotions, and deeply explored the complex and changeable emotional expressions in the learning process. Domestic scholars Yu et al. (2005) were the first to explore the field of academic emotions in China. They defined academic emotion as various emotional reactions experienced by students when they experienced learning success and failure, and this definition clarified the specific situational background of the generation of academic emotion. Subsequently, Guo and Shen (郭龙健 & 申继亮, 2012) further extended the academic emotion to include a variety of emotions triggered by achievements and setbacks in the learning process, not only limited to the classroom, but also extended to all aspects such as pre-class preparation, after-class reflection and examination.

In the context of the shift towards social and emotional dimensions in foreign language research, there is increasing attention on the theoretical exploration of sociocultural and emotional factors. Xu (徐锦芬, 2021) asserts that the sociocultural theory (SCT) developed by Soviet psychologist Vygotsky is particularly favored in contemporary discourse. One of the core concepts of SCT, "perezhivanie" (plural "perezhivaniya"), advocates for a dialectical unity of cognition and emotion, as well as the individual and the environment, which holds significant implications for learners, teaching practices, and teacher development in foreign language education (Lantolf & Swain, 2020; Zhang et al., 2022).

The concept of perezhivaniya from the Vygotskian SCT is in fact difficult to translate in English (Blunden, 2016). Although it may not retain its original meaning, this Russian term is often translated as "emotional experiences" (Mok, 2017) or "emotional responses elevated by one's imagination" (Smagorinsky, 2011).

Perezhivanie is a dynamic and enduring refraction process involving the interaction among an individual's past, present, and future experiences. Perezhivanie is not equivalent to a sum of all these experiences, but "a cognitive and emotional reciprocal processing of previous and new experience" (Golombek & Doran, 2014), meanwhile, all these experiences form a new prism of perezhivanie which will be used to perceive the future experience. In addition, perezhivanie is an enduring refraction process. Individuals' behaviors in certain situations are motivated by their explanation of the present and previous experiences (Poehner, 2022). However, as relevant circumstances and considerations change over time, learners may have different feelings about past experiences or similar events and be motivated differently (Ng, 2022), thus may leading to a different trajectory of development (Vygotsky, 1987).

Perezhivanie can be adopted both as a psychological phenomenon that can be empirically observed and studied and as a theoretical concept for the analysis of the process of development (Veresov, 2017). A review of the latest research on "perezhivanie" both domestically and internationally reveals a rich array of topics. However, scholars interpret "perezhivanie" with varying emphases. For instance, Meng (孟亚茹, 2024) proposed the model of analyzing Perezhivanie, and the method of studying psychological development of Perezhivanie as the unit of analysis was discussed. Finally, the role of Perezhivanie in exploring the holistic path of foreign language education was revealed from the two aspects of learners' foreign language ability and teachers' development. Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) explored the impact of emotional factors on secondary and university-level second language learners through dialogue logs between teachers and learners, highlighting the necessity for teachers to understand learners' "perezhivanie" in the classroom environment to provide emotional support. Swain (2013) emphasized the crucial role of learners' emotions while acknowledging the inseparable connection between emotion and cognition. Future research is likely to expand into other topics, such as exploring the relationship between emotion and agency using the concept of "perezhivanie." Research on the interface between the L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS) and SCT has not been extensively conducted to date, and

only Kim's (2009, 2012) seminal papers are available.

To address the unique perceptions and responses of English majors in Chinese colleges and universities to the environment, this research traced the learner's learning historical path, understood the inherent interaction between the learner's unique history and the environment, and conceptualized perezhivaniya as the unit of analysis. By focusing on such a unit of analysis, it is possible to systematically investigate the differences in traits of L2 learners in their L2 learning experiences and their eventual impact on L2 learning motivation.

L2 Motivation and Emotion

Emotion is a primary motive. Motivation and emotion are intertwined; emotions, whether positive or negative, form the foundation of second language (L2) learning motivation (MacIntyre, 2002; MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017; MacIntyre, Ross & Clément, 2020; Pawlak, Zarrinabadi & Kruk, 2022). Meanwhile, Teimouri (2017) posits that any motivated behavior also elicits certain types of negative and positive emotions. Emotions can play a significant role in the process of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and communication, yet this influence has been underestimated in both research and teaching literature (Dewaele, 2012; MacIntyre, 2002). For a long time, SLA research has mainly focused on the impact of individual differences such as cognition and motivation on second language learning, with little attention paid to emotions. Moreover, most of the research that does concern emotions has concentrated on the study of anxiety (Li, 2021).

In multi-dimensional learner factor models, particularly those of Gardner(1985, 2010), Clément (1980, 1986), and Dörnyei (2005), positive and negative emotions in language learning motivation have been explored. Gardner's integrative motive has room for both positive (e.g., desire to learn, interest in languages) and negative emotions (e.g., classroom and language-use anxiety). Clément's socio-contextual model, similar to Gardner's in some ways, focuses on acculturation with "fear of assimilation" as a key emotional process. For minority-group language learners, there's a tension between integrating with the new language and preserving their heritage. Self-confidence, a secondary factor, aids language acquisition through low anxiety and high communicative competence, also seen in later willingness-to-communicate models. Influenced by the contextualization of motivation, Dörnyei (2005) realized that L2 learning experience related to various characteristics of learner groups significantly affected learners' L2 motivation, so he incorporated L2 Learning Environmrnt (L2LE) as an essential dimension, aligning with ideal L2 self (IL2S) and ought-to L2 self (OL2S), jointly consisted a new motivation theory——L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). L2MSS provides a clear framework to explore the influence of both internal and external factors on learners' motivation, however, with the vigorous development of empirical research, unfortunately, L2LE is gradually marginalized due to its historical roots and undertheorized nature (Dörnyei, 2009).

Combining Gardner's model of the influence of positive and negative emotions on language learning motivation and Dornyei's model of the influence of L2 learning experience on L2 learning motivation, this study proposes the concept of perezhivanie as the unit of analysis to fill the gap of SCT's research on the emotion of English major students in continuing education. In order to comprehensively and deeply understand the learners' learning motivation and the emotions generated in the learning process.

Research Gap

Although a considerable amount of research has been accumulated in areas such as learning motivation, second language acquisition, and affective studies, there are still some significant gaps, especially in understanding the learning motivation and emotional experiences of Chinese English major students when pursuing postgraduate courses.

Previous research has predominantly focused on general learning motivation, learning burnout, and educational satisfaction. Specialized investigations into the "motivation for further education" from undergraduate to master's levels are scarce. Existing studies on graduate student learning motivation, which cover pathways like entrance exams, recommendation-based admissions, and studying abroad, mainly focus on analyzing the causal mechanisms of "social facts," exploring the reasons for continuing education, or classifying admission motivations. However, they failed to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the specific characteristics and motivational differences of Chinese English major students when choosing different further education paths. The lack of specialized research on this particular student group has hindered the development of targeted educational strategies.

In the field of L2 learning motivation research, due to the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the concept, research results have been inconsistent. Gardner's classic integrative motivation has long overshadowed other conceptualizations of L2 motivation. Therefore, there has been limited progress in integrating various aspects of L2 motivation and other affective variables, such as L2 anxiety, into a unified framework. This gap restricts our understanding of how these factors interact and jointly influence the learning and decision-making processes of English major students during their postgraduate studies.

Regarding the concept of "perezhivanie" within Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, although it has attracted

academic attention, its conceptual explication and empirical investigation are still in their infancy. At present, empirical research based on this concept mainly adopts a qualitative research paradigm, which is characterized by a relatively small sample size. This limitation makes it difficult to capture the emotional traits of all English major students. Moreover, there is a lack of research that effectively uses the concept of "perezhivanie" to explore the relationship between academic motivation and emotional experience during the postgraduate entrance examination process among Chinese English major students. This gap hinders our full exploitation of the potential of this theoretical concept to improve educational practice and support students' mental health.

Addressing these research gaps is crucial for enhancing our understanding of the motivations and emotional experiences of Chinese English major students when pursuing postgraduate courses, which in turn can provide a basis for formulating more effective educational policies, teaching methods and psychological counseling services.

III. Methodology

Settings and Participants

This study was conducted at Xi'an Jiaotong university, one of the C9 League universities in China. The 88 questionnaire participants from this university were all junior and senior English majors. Six of the questionnaire participants, Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D, Student E and Student F, who were also senior students were then invited to a semi-structured interview. All the interviewees are Chinese citizens and received their education from the educational system in mainland China.

Research Design: an Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Study

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. It was anticipated that a scale would be developed by adapting the Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand et al., 1992) to assess the differences in advancement motivations among students with different further-study pathways: recommended admission, entrance examination and study abroad. To meet the requirements of this study, the revised scale will collect more descriptive information from individuals (such as age, gender, etc.) to identify any potential motivational characteristic indicators. Subsequently, the data will be analyzed using SPSS software. The scientific rigor and validity of the research results will be verified through reliability and validity analysis. The normality of the scale data was also tested, and analysis of variance and correlation analysis were conducted to examine the interrelationships among variables.

Furthermore, through the method of semi-structured interview, six students (A, B, C, D , E, F) was selected from each group (entrance examination group, recommended admission group, and study abroad group) for retrospective interviews regarding their emotional experiences in choosing to pursue further education. The entire interview process was recorded. Subsequently, the interview audio will be transcribed into text form. Keywords will be presented in the form of a word cloud. Meanwhile, a thematic analysis research method will be adopted. The text will be coded line by line using Delve's cloud-based QDA coding software. This is an inductive coding method, and line-by-line coding enables the codes to be generated directly from the data without any preconceived notions. Finally, the line-by-line coding will be further integrated into sub-themes and ultimately form main themes.
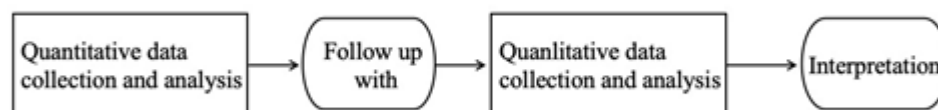

Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-2 Exploratory Sequential Design

Instruments
Survey and Scale

The data were collected using a scale developed specifically for the context of the study. The scale was designed with reference to and adaptation of the Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand, 1992).

The Academic Motivation Scale (AMS), based on Self-Determination Theory, is specifically designed for undergraduate students. It consists of 28 questions and is measured using a 7-point Likert scale. The AMS helps to measure intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and further subdivides each category into subcategories, enabling a detailed analysis of each type of motivation.

Under intrinsic motivation, motivations such as "to know" (cognitive exploration motivation/academic interest motivation), "toward accomplishment" (achievement - seeking motivation), and "to experience

stimulation" (academic interest motivation/cultural experience motivation) have been identified (Vallerand, 1998).

Under extrinsic motivation, subcategories such as "external regulation" (social interaction and reputation motivation/family and external expectations motivation), "introjected regulation" (social interaction and reputation motivation), and "identified regulation" (career development motivation) have been identified.

This research uses Cronbach's α coefficient analysis tool to evaluate the reliability of the scale. For scales with known dimensions, after testing the reliability coefficient of the overall scale, the reliability test of each dimension was also conducted. The test results are shown in Table 3-1.

Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-1 Cronbach Reliability Analysis

Cronbach α	Number of items
0.892	28

As can be seen from the above table, the overall Cronbach's α coefficient of the College Entrance Motivation Scale is 0.892>0.8. This indicates that the test results of using this scale to measure relevant indicators have good stability, consistency, and reliability. Since it is known that this scale is divided into seven dimensions, the reliability effect of the specific dimensions of this scale will be further examined. The test results are shown in Table 3-2.

Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-2 Reliability Analysis of Seven Dimensions

Dimension	Cronbach α
Knowledge and Exploration Motivation	0.877
Achievement Pursuit Motivation	0.806
Learning Interest Motivation	0.798
Cultural Experience Motivation	0.814
Career Development Motivation	0.863
Social and Reputation Motivations	0.809
Family and External Expectation Motivation	0.833

It can be concluded from the results of the above table that the reliability coefficients of all dimensions of this scale are above the level of 0.7. This indicates that each dimension of the scale also has good reliability.

The validity test of the scale mainly measures the structural validity and content validity between the items of the scale and its dimensions, as well as among various dimensions.

Before conducting the exploratory factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (KMO test) and the suitability test of the factor analysis model (Bartlett's test of sphericity) were carried out on the 28 items of the Postgraduate Motivation Scale. The analysis results show that the KMO values of the 24 items that all people need to fill out and the 4 items that only students studying abroad need to fill out are 0.764 and 0.769 respectively, indicating that the research data is suitable for factor analysis. It reflects from the side that the data has good validity and can effectively extract information. The approximate chi-square values of Bartlett's test of sphericity are 1,270.200 and 38.249 respectively, with p<0.001, indicating that there are common factors among the variables and it is suitable for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA).

In this study, EFA with Varimax orthogonal rotation was employed to conduct dimensionality reduction analysis on the graduate school motivation data of 88 English major students, aiming to extract the latent factor structure. For the cultural experience motivation, when the 4 items under this motivation all correspond to Factor 1, and their factor loading coefficients are all higher than 0.4, it indicates that these four items should belong to the same dimension (Table 3-3).

Similarly, based on the EFA testing, when the knowledge exploration motivation, achievement pursuit motivation, learning interest motivation, career development motivation, social interaction and reputation motivation, and family and external expectations motivation all correspond to Factors 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, respectively, the factor loading coefficients of the four items under each motivation are all higher than 0.4, indicating that the above-classified items belong to one dimension (Appendix E).

Since the standard load coefficients of some measurement items are lower than 0.6. For example, when measuring the achievement pursuit motivation with the item "I believe that obtaining a postgraduate degree can enhance my comprehensive abilities and make me a better person", the standardized load coefficient is 0.516. When measuring the learning interest motivation with the item "I hope to conduct academic research under my favorite supervisor during the postgraduate study period", the standardized load coefficient is 0.529. When measuring the career development motivation with the item "I choose to pursue a postgraduate degree because of the fierce competition in the current job market, and it is difficult for English majors to find suitable jobs after

graduating from undergraduate studies", the standardized load coefficient is 0.529. When measuring the social interaction and reputation motivation with the item "The social network of my supervisor and alumni is crucial for my future development", the standardized load coefficient is 0.585. When measuring the family and external expectation motivation with the item "My undergraduate teacher advised me to continue my postgraduate study", the standardized load coefficient is 0.566. When measuring the cultural experience motivation with the item "I didn't study abroad before, so I look forward to having a study abroad experience", the standardized load coefficient is 0.441. These measurement items have a weak relationship with the corresponding factors, which may affect the measurement accuracy. Therefore, such items are removed.

Table 3-3 The Rotated Factor Loading Coefficient Table

Item	Factor Loading Coefficient	Communality (Common Factor Variance)
	Factor 1	
Experiencing diverse national cultures through studying abroad is one of the primary reasons for my choice to pursue graduate studies overseas.	0.932	0.868
Developing my life skills through studying in a foreign country is a significant factor influencing my decision to pursue graduate education abroad.	0.885	0.784
As an English major, understanding the educational philosophies and academic cultures of different countries is highly appealing to me.	0.895	0.802
Having not studied abroad before, I anticipate gaining a study-abroad experience.	0.568	0.323

As shown in Table 3-4, the convergent validity is evaluated through the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) and CR (Composite Reliability) indicators. The AVE values of the seven factors are all greater than 0.5, and the CR values are all higher than 0.7, indicating that each factor can effectively explain the variation of the measurement items. The data has good convergent validity, that is, each measurement item can well reflect the corresponding latent variable.

Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-4 Results of Model AVE and CR Metrics

Factor	AVE Value	CR Value
Knowledge Exploration Motivation	0.656	0.884
Achievement Pursuit Motivation	0.541	0.821
Learning Interest Motivation	0.520	0.809
Career Development Motivation	0.661	0.884
Social and Reputation Motivations	0.528	0.815
Family and External Expectation Motivation	0.587	0.847
Cultural Experience Motivation	0.626	0.863

On the basis of drawing on the successful experience of the AMS scale, this scale is developed according to the actual situation of the college entrance motivation of English majors in Chinese universities, aiming to create a scale that is suitable for measuring the college entrance motivation of English majors in Chinese universities. The final scale contains 22 items, and the process of item development and screening of the scale is shown in Figure 3-2. The results of the reliability and validity tests meet the requirements of psychometrics.
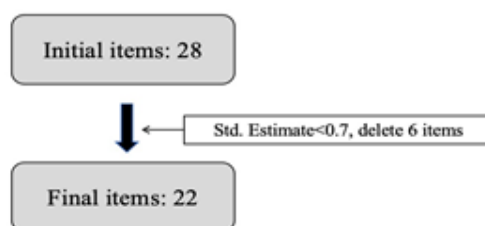

Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-3 Flow Chart of the Compilation and Screening of Scale Items

The normality test is the primary inspection step for determining the data distribution and selecting

parametric or non-parametric analysis methods.

As shown in Appendix D, although the p-values are all less than 0.05, indicating significance, the absolute value of kurtosis is less than 10 and the absolute value of skewness is less than 3. This suggests that although the data are not perfectly normal, they can basically be accepted as conforming to a normal distribution.

After the normality test has been conducted and it is determined that the data can be basically accepted as following a normal distribution, although the normality test has already provided a conclusion based on statistical indicators, this conclusion is relatively abstract. In contrast, a histogram can visually and intuitively display the distribution pattern of the data.

In this study, the "total score" is selected as the indicator for drawing the histogram. This is a comprehensive consideration of multiple variables related to the motivation for pursuing postgraduate studies, covering seven dimensions: the motivation for intellectual exploration, the motivation for achievement pursuit, the motivation for learning interest, the motivation for cultural experience, the motivation for career development, the motivation for social reputation, and the motivation from family and external expectations.

By conducting a normality test on the "total score", it is possible to evaluate, from an overall perspective, the data distribution under the combined influence of these factors, and to reflect the characteristics of the research subjects at the overall level of their motivation for pursuing postgraduate studies. This approach is more comprehensive and representative than using a single variable.

Meanwhile, the overall design of the questionnaire is such that the stronger the willingness to pursue postgraduate studies, the higher the total score. Thus, the fact that the total score conforms to a normal distribution indicates that information has been collected from individuals with different levels of willingness to pursue postgraduate studies. The diverse score situations reflect the different motivations and attitudes of various groups of people when faced with the choice of pursuing postgraduate studies, providing a rich data foundation for an in-depth analysis of the differences in the motivation for pursuing postgraduate studies among different groups.

Visually, it can be seen from the Figure 3-3 that the data distribution presents a shape with a high middle and low ends. Most of the data are concentrated around the score range of 120-150, with a relatively high frequency. In contrast, in the intervals at both ends, that is, the lower scores (around 60 points) and the higher scores (above 180 points), the frequencies are relatively low. Meanwhile, the green curve superimposed on the histogram shows a pattern similar to a bell-shaped normal distribution curve, which further indicates that the overall data has characteristics similar to a normal distribution. This confirms the conclusion drawn from the previous normality test that the data basically conforms to a normal distribution. It shows that the distribution of the "total score" data, which comprehensively considers the motivation for postgraduate study in this research, is reasonable and regular, laying a foundation for subsequent analyses based on this data.

Semi-structured Interview Protocols

The concept of an interview is based on dialogue. As a research method, an interview typically involves a face-to-face discussion between two individuals, guided by a set of pre-determined questions (Gubrium, 2002). Semi-structured interviews are suitable for the study of emotional experiences (Gomez, 2008). There are mainly two considerations for choosing them as a means of qualitative data collection. Firstly, it is highly appropriate for exploring the interviewees' perspectives and opinions on complex issues, enabling in-depth exploration to obtain more information and clarify the answers. Secondly, the diverse further education paths and motivations within the sample group rule out the possibility of using standardized interviews. The data collected through semi-structured interviews are more comprehensive and in-depth, enabling the acquisition of the interviewees' unique perspectives, personal experiences, and profound emotional experiences. At the same time, due to its flexibility, although the organization and analysis of the data are relatively complex and it is not very suitable for statistical analysis of large-scale data, it is highly applicable to exploratory research and is conducive to a deep understanding of the true emotional experiences of the research subjects in the context of their motivations for continuing education (Adams, 2015).
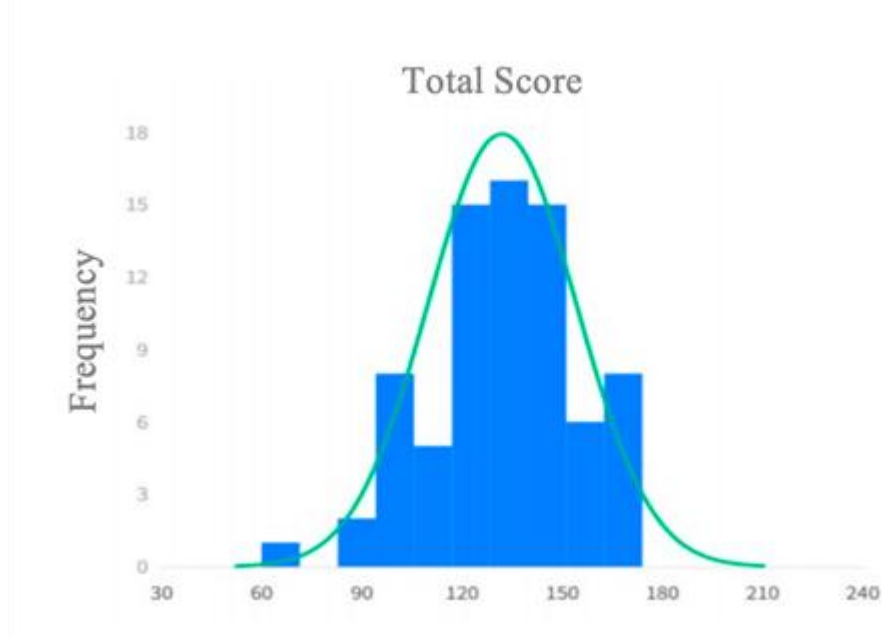
Total Score

Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-4 Histogram for Normality Test

As one of the core concepts of Social Cultural Theory (SCT), "perezhivanie" holds profound theoretical value. Vygotsky identified it as an analytical unit for exploring the influence of the sociocultural environment on an individual's psychological development, aiming to capture the dialectical unity between emotion and cognition at the core of human consciousness, as well as the unity between the individual and the social environment. Johnson & Worden (2014) pointed out that this concept presents the dialectical unity of an individual's cognition and emotion, and accurately captures the subjective meaning of an individual's experience within the sociocultural environment.

Vygotsky emphasized that an individual's development is jointly influenced by emotion and cognition, and "perezhivanie" can precisely serve as an analytical unit for the "dynamic meaning system that combines emotion and reason" in the process of an individual's development. Lantolf & Swain (2019) further analyzed that the emotional response to a specific environment constitutes the emotional component of "perezhivanie", while the evaluation of this emotional response constitutes the intellectual component, indicating that it encompasses emotions as well as their evaluation and response.

Based on the above theories, this study will apply the thematic analysis method to deeply analyze the emotional experiences of English major undergraduates during their preparation for the postgraduate entrance examination, recommendation for postgraduate studies, or studying abroad, which are influenced by their motivations for pursuing postgraduate studies. This study adopts a qualitative research design. Firstly, a semi-structured interview outline is developed around the research questions, and interviews are conducted accordingly (Figure 3-4). Then, open coding was used to process the qualitative data obtained from the interviews. Finally, following the thematic analysis process proposed by Braun and Clarke, themes reflecting the interaction between public information behavior and emotions in specific contexts were extracted from the identified coding labels.

During this process, students frequently interact with the learning environment, social environment and academic environment. The concept of "perezhivanie" and its related theories and methods provide a powerful theoretical support and analytical tool for in-depth exploration of their psychological changes in this complex process, understanding how emotions and cognition are dialectically unified, and how individuals subjectively attribute meaning to their own experiences.

After the interviews were completed, the interview recordings were transcribed into text format, resulting in a total of 6 texts with a combined word count of 18,231 words.

This study conducted an inductive thematic analysis of the open-text data collected from the interviews. Firstly, the researchers repeatedly read all the interview texts and engaged in brief discussions. Subsequently, a qualitative analysis software, Delve's cloud-based QDA coding software, was introduced to assist with the coding work of this study, aiming to standardize and regulate the text analysis process. Examples of coding are shown in Table 3-5.

Then, the researchers evaluated and named the core themes respectively. Generally, a theme needs to be discussed by about 50% of the samples in the interviews to be classified as a core theme. However, this

classification proportion can be adjusted according to the actual situation to prevent some meaningful themes from being overlooked (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

Finally, the researchers compared the 31 codes generated from the 122 reference points identified in the interviews, and examined whether the preliminarily generated themes could be further combined into core themes, whether the identified themes had identifiable unique features, and whether they had clear general representativeness. Eventually, the theme naming was confirmed. The whole process of thematic analysis was shown in Figure 3-5.

Data Collection

The data collection in this quantitative research was carried out through the online questionnaire collection platform Wenjuanxing. A total of 88 questionnaires were actually retrieved.

Before conducting data inspection, it is an essential and crucial step to describe the distribution and current situation of the scale data. In order to explore the further education motivation of English majors in China, the distribution of demographic basic information, including gender, grade, undergraduate academic performance, and postgraduate admission pathways, is first explained.
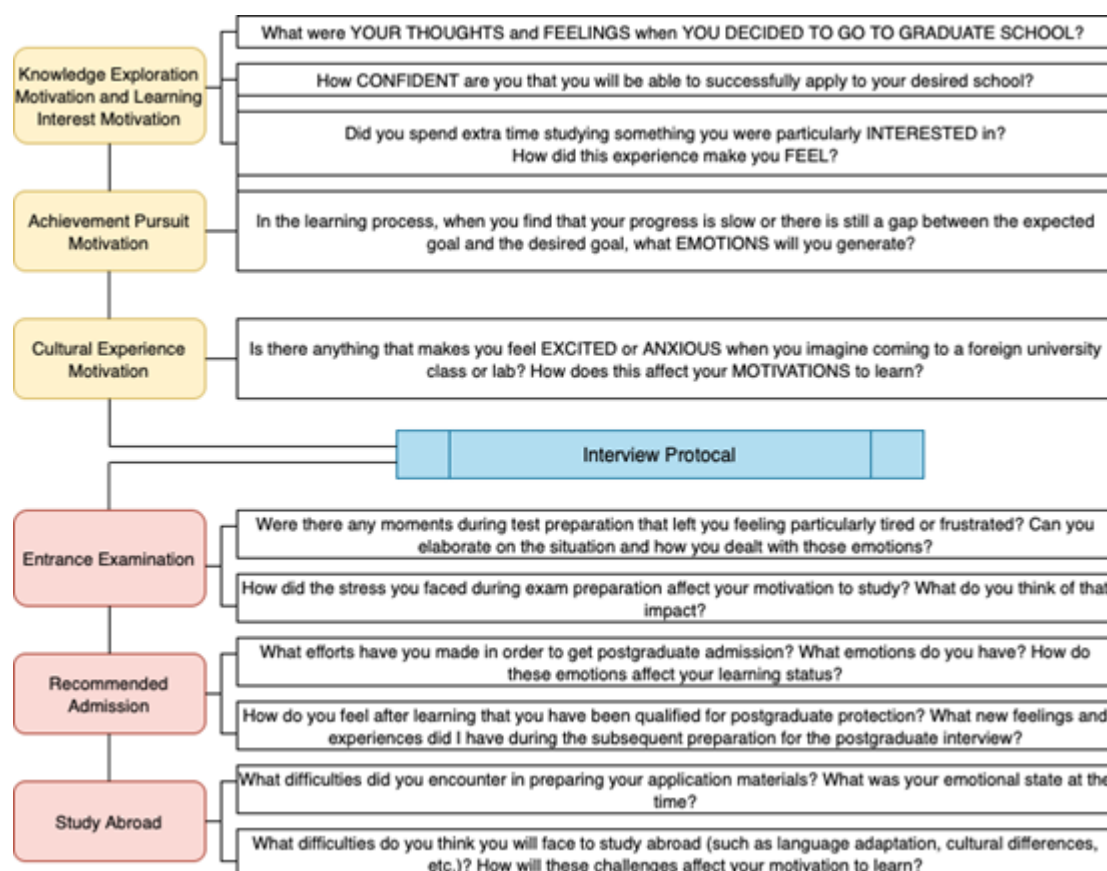
Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-5 Outline of Semi-structured Interviews

Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-5 Coding Text Examples

Data Extract	Coded for
"I feel happy in the process of preparing for the test, maybe a little bit happy when I do the test and think I've done well."	Sense of achievement
"I think for a while at summer camp I thought it was a little bit of a thrill."	Passionate
"The main stress is the fear of failing."	Fear of failure

The distribution of the gender and academic qualifications of the surveyed objects is not very uniform, and this phenomenon is in line with the actual situation of the composition of English major undergraduates in Chinese universities. Therefore, it can support the data analysis of the original hypothesis.

In terms of the distribution of sample size (Figure 3 - 6), females account for 63.64% and males for 36.36%, indicating an imbalance between genders. The number of female students majoring in English is relatively large,

which is consistent with the overall gender characteristics of the English major (李婉芳, 2023). Third-year students make up 52.27% and fourth-year students 47.73% (Figure 3 - 6).
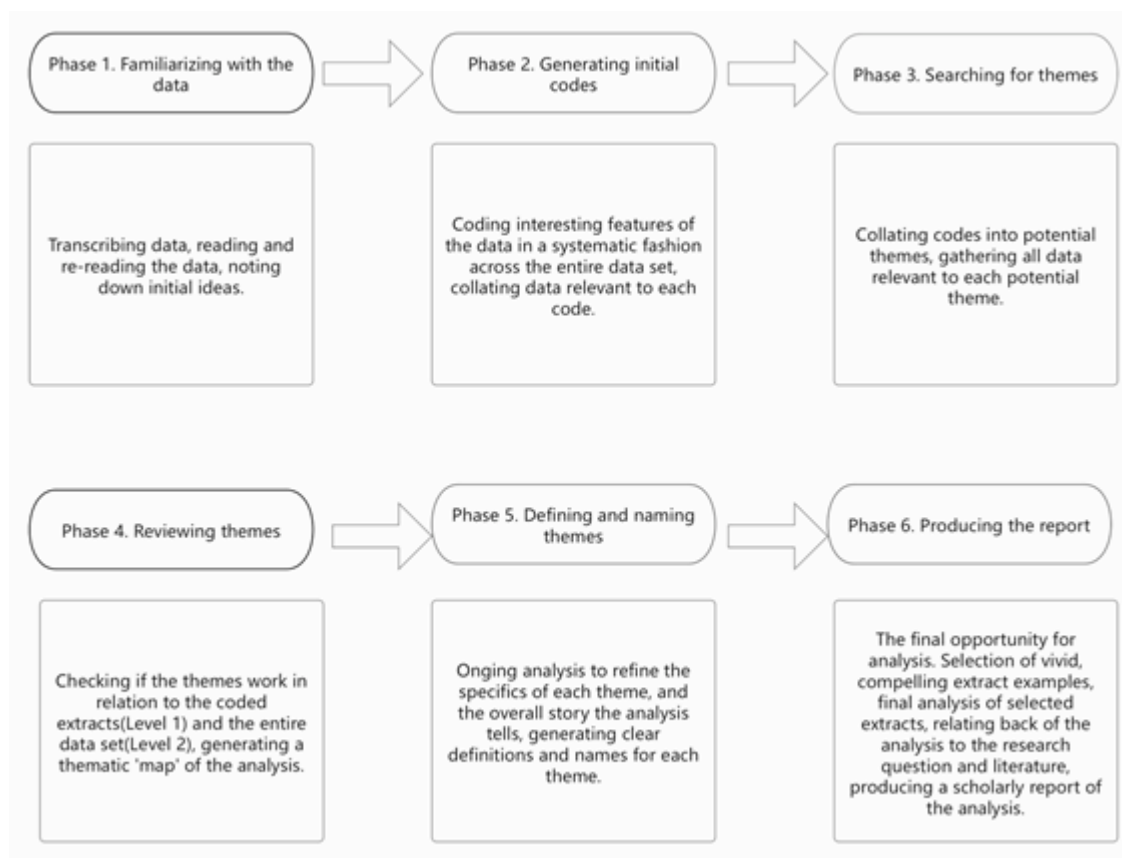

Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-6 Thematic Analysis Flow Chart
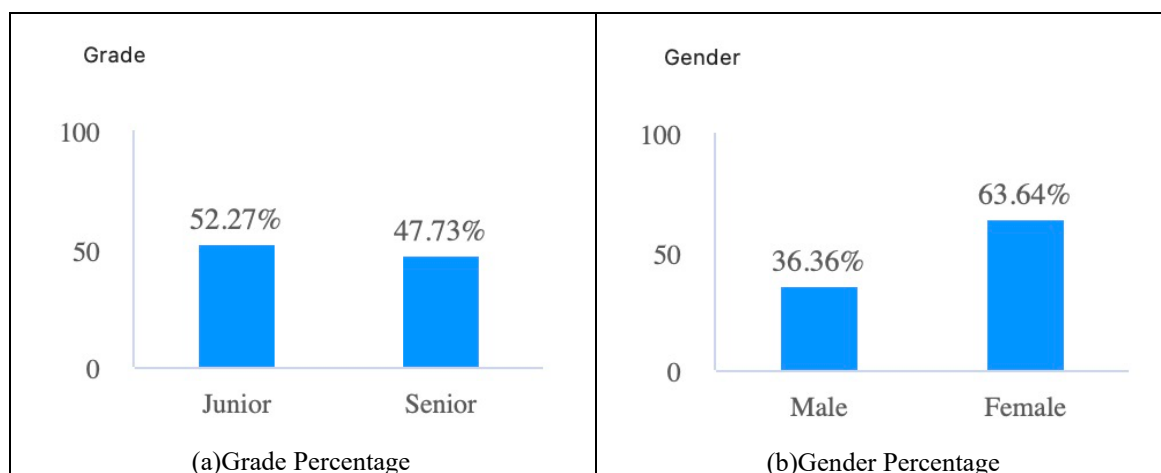

Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-7 Distribution of Subjects

In terms of academic ranking (Figure 3-7), it is acknowledged that the sample covers students at different academic levels, indicating that both students with excellent grades and those with relatively lower grades have considered the choice of postgraduate study, which is helpful for a comprehensive analysis of the differences in the motivation for postgraduate study among students with different academic levels.
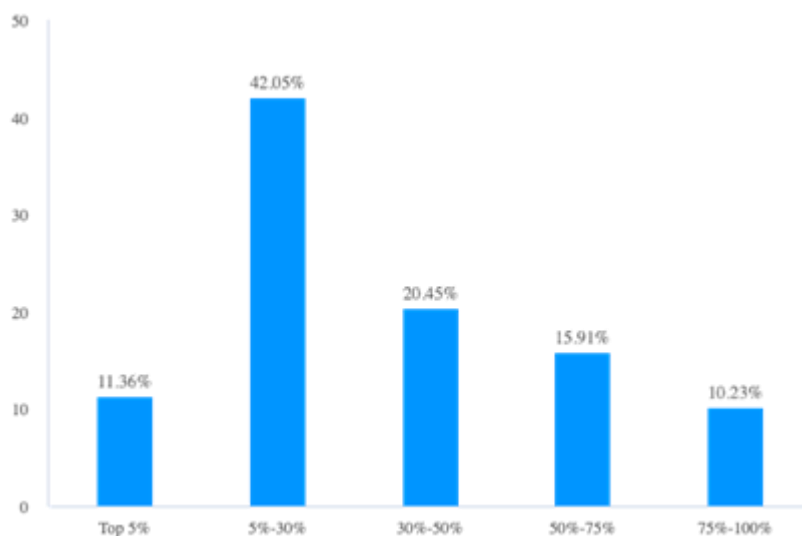
Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-8 Ranking Distribution

Students who plan to pursue postgraduate studies account for 86.36%, and those who do not plan to pursue postgraduate studies account for 13.64%. Among the students who plan to pursue postgraduate studies, those who choose to be recommended for admission account for 46.05%, those who take the entrance examination account for 27.63%, and those who plan to study abroad account for 26.32% (Figure 3-8). This reflects that most English major students have a high demand for improving their academic qualifications, and the choices of college entrance paths are diversified. The choices of different paths may involve various factors, providing rich analysis perspectives for subsequent research.

Data Analysis

This analysis was conducted in a explanatory sequential mixed method, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a multi-faceted understanding of the research question.

From a quantitative perspective, the study first conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the measurement tool SPSS 29.0.1.0. The reliability and validity of the adapted academic motivation scale were carefully examined through Cronbach's α coefficient analysis, KMO test, Bartlett's sphericity test, and factor analysis, ensuring that the scale is a reliable and effective tool for measuring the relevant constructs. Descriptive analysis provided the foundation, presenting the distribution of demographic variables and motivation scores, highlighting the prevalence of certain motivations and trends in the academic profile of the sample. Normality tests determined the distribution characteristics of the data, which is crucial for subsequent statistical analysis. By analyzing means, standard deviations, and conducting analysis of variance, differences in motivation among different graduate study paths were compared, revealing similarities and differences in students' motivational profiles.
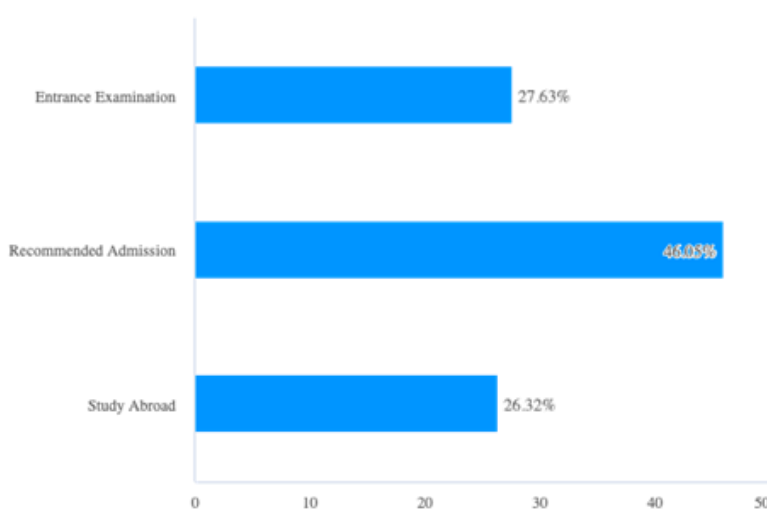

Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-9 Distribution of students in each pathway

From a qualitative perspective, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the obtained data were transcribed for in-depth analysis. Subsequently, the thematic analysis method was employed using Delve (Twenty to Nine LLC, 2024), including open coding, theme identification, and theme confirmation. This process enabled the extraction of meaningful themes related to students' emotional experiences. Emotional analysis, including the use of word clouds and heat maps, provided insights into the types and intensities of emotions experienced by different groups of students, further enriching the understanding of the emotional aspects during the pursuit of a postgraduate degree.

Ethical Consideration and Trustworthiness of the Study

All participants signed a written informed consent form before participating in this study. We emphasized that they had the right to withdraw from the study or stop participating at any time without facing any adverse consequences. Additionally, we committed to keeping the participants' personal information confidential and ensuring their privacy was protected throughout the research process.

During the interviews, we made efforts to create a comfortable and relaxed environment to encourage open communication. We clearly informed the participants that they could stop participating immediately if they felt any discomfort.

To ensure the credibility of the research, we incorporated reflexivity into the data analysis, as highlighted by Nowell et al. (2017), which is a crucial element for successful audit trails. Throughout the research process, we maintained a self-critical attitude and followed the approach proposed by Tobin and Begley (2004), which enabled us to promptly identify and address potential biases and limitations. This not only enhanced the reliability of our research results but also demonstrated our commitment to conducting rigorous and ethical research.

IV. Results

Motivational Characteristics and Differences Across Pathways

Overall Distribution of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations from the Further Education Motivation Scale

On the one hand, from the data collected by this scale (Appendix C), "I believe that pursuing a postgraduate degree can help me acquire the professional skills and qualifications required for certain occupations." (with an average score of 6.342, a "strongly agree" proportion of 57.89%, a standard deviation of 1.014, and a kurtosis of 7.428) is the motivational item with the highest score. Students have a relatively consistent perception of this motivation, and the data distribution is steeper than the normal distribution, with more respondents giving more extreme evaluations.

This result indicates that a clear instrumental incentive chain has been formed–students generally believe that postgraduate studies can directly enhance their professional skills, obtain the qualifications required by the industry, and thus improve their employability, which is in line with the instrumental motivation proposed in Gardner's (1972) motivation theory. Instrumental motivation refers to using language as a tool to obtain information in the learning process, such as for the purpose of achieving a better career in the future, acquiring reading or translation abilities, etc.

Currently, the job market is highly competitive, and the employment environment for English majors is no exception. With the expansion of enrollments in English majors at universities, the number of graduates has increased, and the employment competition has become more intense. Also, the workplace has increasingly professional and diversified requirements for English majors. Merely having English language proficiency is no longer sufficient to meet market demands, and professional skills and qualifications in specific industries have become crucial.

Students clearly recognize that pursuing a postgraduate degree is an effective way to acquire the skills and qualifications required for these occupations, which can enhance their competitiveness in the workplace and provide them with more and better job opportunities. The prominence of this motivation reflects students' rational response to the realistic pressure of the job market, as they regard postgraduate studies as a tool to improve their employability and adapt to market demands.

On the other hand, the mean value of "Interest in Scientific Research and Academic Competitions" is only 3.763 points (Table 4-1), which is the lowest in the entire scale. The proportion of students who choose "strongly disagree" reaches 11.54%. This reflects the reality of insufficient scientific research training in the undergraduate stage of English majors.

Thus, it can be seen that the curriculum design philosophy and teaching philosophy of "language skill training-oriented" that have long been implemented in English majors can no longer meet the needs of society and the requirements of talent cultivation (常俊跃, 2020). The language skill-oriented training model for English majors—such as the high proportion of courses like Comprehensive English, Oral English, and Translation—and the lack of courses related to cultivating academic interests may weaken the cultivation of early academic research interests.

Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-3 Descriptive Analysis of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations

Item	Average score ±Standard deviation	Variance	Kurtosis	Skewness
"Pursuing a postgraduate degree can help me acquire the professional skills and qualifications required for certain occupations"	6.342±1.014	1.028	7.428	2.393
"Interest in scientific research and academic competitions motivates me to pursue graduate school"	3.763±1.765	3.116	0.930	0.147

From the students' perspective, the low score and the negative attitude of some students may be due to the lack of systematic and effective scientific research guidance during the undergraduate study process. Many curriculum systems for English majors focus on the cultivation of language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation, and there is relatively little training in scientific research methods and academic research thinking. During their studies, students have limited exposure to scientific research projects and academic competition-related content, and they do not understand the fun and value of scientific research, resulting in a lack of interest in it. For example, in the English major curriculum of some schools, courses on scientific research methods are offered relatively late, and the class hours are limited, making it difficult for students in the lower grades to establish a basic understanding and interest in scientific research.

From the perspective of the school, this phenomenon also reflects the insufficiency in the allocation of scientific research and educational resources. On the one hand, there may be limitations in terms of teaching staff. Some teachers have limited energy to devote to research and thus cannot provide adequate research guidance to students. On the other hand, the school offers insufficient research platforms and opportunities. For instance, there are few research projects for students to participate in, and the organization of academic competitions is also not well-developed. This makes it difficult for students to gain practical research experience even if they are interested, and they gradually lose enthusiasm as a result.

To improve this situation, schools should optimize the curriculum system for English majors, increase the proportion of courses on scientific research methods, and integrate scientific research training into daily teaching. For instance, activities such as course papers and group research projects can be carried out to enhance students' research capabilities through practice. Meanwhile, the construction of the teaching staff should be strengthened, and teachers should be encouraged to actively participate in guiding students' research work, providing them with more research opportunities and resources. Besides, it is also necessary to guide students to establish a correct research concept.

Mean Values and Standard Deviations of Motivations for Each Pathway (entrance exams, recommendation admissions, studying abroad)

As shown in Table 4-2, the mean score of students in the recommended admission group scored relatively high in the career development motivation (M=6.04±1.33), knowledge exploration motivation (M=5.57±1.21) and family and external expectation motivation (M=5.46±1.63). This indicates that students in the recommended admission group has a relatively clear plan for their future career path and tends to anchor educational resources related to their career goals in advance through the recommended admission channel. Also, the ralatively high mean score in knowledge exploration motivation reflects students' active pursuit of academic knowledge, which may be related to the emphasis on subject interest and academic potential in the recommendation and admission mechanism. As we all know, the students recommended for postgraduate education are always the group already having gained some excellent academic achievements and shown their potential in academia.

For students recommended for admission, family expectations may manifest as a high level of concern for their academic performance and specific plans for their future career development, which to some extent motivates them to strive for the opportunity to be recommended for postgraduate studies. At the same time, public opinion and the surrounding environment also have an impact on students. For instance, society generally recognizes the value of a high degree, and there is also competition among classmates and friends. These external factors collectively form a powerful source of pressure and motivation. This high score means that students recommended for postgraduate studies will consider the expectations of their families and society to a greater extent when making choices and taking actions. During the postgraduate stage, they may pay more attention to their academic performance and comprehensive quality to live up to the expectations of their families and society.

The mean score of students in the postgraduate entrance examination group scored higher (M=6.46±1.70) in career development motivation compared with the other two groups. This reflects that postgraduate entrance examination candidates regard obtaining a higher academic degree as an important means to enhance their

employability. They attach great importance to the connection between further education and career development, and there is a significant variation in the views of the members within this group regarding this aspect.

The motivation of the study-abroad group is relatively scattered. Although the score in career development motivation is relatively high, the scores in other dimensions are all on the low side. In terms of the motivation for seeking knowledge and exploration (5.43±1.72), the large standard deviation indicates significant individual differences, which may be related to the diversity of study-abroad goals (such as the destination country and the major chosen). The low score (4.15±1.86) in learning interest motivation, along with the large individual differences, implies that some students do not choose to study abroad purely out of professional interest, and they may be influenced by other factors such as the experience of a different environment

Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-4 Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Each Dimension

Pathway	Knowledge and Exploration Motivation	Achievement Pursuit Motivation	Learning Interest Motivation	Career Development Motivation	Social and Reputation Motivation	Family and External Expectation Motivation
Entrance Examination	5.62±1.13	4.35±1.50	4.44±1.47	6.46±1.70	4.86±1.74	5.08±1.63
Recommended Admission	5.57±1.21	4.91±1.43	4.71±1.55	6.04±1.33	4.91±1.65	5.46±1.63
Study Abroad	5.43±1.72	4.12±1.66	4.15±1.86	6.18±1.33	4.88±1.59	4.63±1.87

Overall, the core motivations of students recommended for postgraduate studies are career development, knowledge exploration, and family expectations, presenting a composite model of "family support+career planning+academic focus", with high consistency of motivation, and focused on using institutional advantages to lay out professional development in advance. The postgraduate entrance examination group had career goals as the core driving force, supplemented by systematic knowledge learning needs, weak family intervention, and the motivation structure was biased towards "pragmatism". Studying abroad is also oriented to career development and takes into account social reputation, but the motivations are diversified with significant individual differences, reflecting the diversity of goals among the group of students going abroad.

Variance Analysis (ANOVA) in Motivation across Pathways

The study collected data from students who intended to pursue postgraduate studies. There were 21 students in the postgraduate entrance examination group, 35 in the postgraduate-recommendation group, and 20 in the study-abroad group. Since questions 16, 17, and 18 were only designed for the study-abroad group, they were not included in the analysis of variance. Data for the 19 motivations for postgraduate study were recorded in the form of mean score±standard deviation (Table 4-1). One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to analyze the impact of different further-study pathways (independent variable) on each motivation for postgraduate study (dependent variable), and the significance of differences was determined by calculating the F-value and Sig.-value.

For these 19 items, whether there were significant differences among the three groups depended on the significance level. The null hypothesis was that there were no significant differences among the students of the three groups in the 19 items. When the asymptotic significance level was less than the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected; otherwise, it was accepted. As can be seen from Appendix F,

On many key dimensions of further-study motivations, the mean scores of students choosing the paths of taking the postgraduate entrance examination, obtaining a postgraduate recommendation, and studying abroad are extremely close, and the results of statistical tests show no significant differences.

In terms of knowledge and exploration motivation, the motivation of "I want to go to graduate school (postgraduate entrance examination, postgraduate guarantee, study abroad) to obtain more cutting-edge and in-depth professional knowledge", after the ANOVA analysis of three groups, the F value is 0.310, and the p value is 0.735. This shows that the desire of students to acquire more professional knowledge is basically the same no matter what kind of further study path they choose. For the motivation of "curiosity in the field of professional knowledge makes me choose to pursue graduate school", the F value is 0.310, and the p value is 0.735, which indicates that there is no significant difference in the curiosity of different groups of students in the field of professional knowledge. For "learning new knowledge itself makes me feel fulfilled and satisfied", the F value is 1.529, and the p value is 0.224.For the motivation of "hope to expand the boundary of knowledge and explore more unknown areas through postgraduate study", the F value is 0.011, and the p value is 0.989, which further confirms the consistency of the three in the pursuit of knowledge expansion, and the motivation of knowledge and exploration does not affect students' choice of further education path.

Career development motivation shows a similar trend. Under the incentive of "postgraduate entrance examination can improve employability", the F value is 0.983 and the p value is 0.379. For the motivation "attending graduate school can increase my career income by allowing me to obtain a higher starting salary or a faster promotion," the F-measure is 1.617 and the p-value is 0.205. For the motivation "I think graduate school can help me gain the professional skills and qualifications required for certain careers," the F-measure is 0.402 and the p-value is 0.670. These data fully show that there is no significant difference in the motivation of students with different continuing learning paths in terms of enhancing career competitiveness and gaining career development advantages through postgraduate study.

Similarly, from Appendix F, in the social and reputation motivation, learning interest motivation and achievement pursuit motivation, this study found no significant differences through F value and p value.

However, for the motivation of "The 'postgraduate-study craze' among peers around me prompts me to follow the trend and choose to pursue postgraduate studies", the significance level was less than 0.05. Therefore, it can be considered that there were significant differences among the three groups in terms of understanding of the major, and further analysis of the differences was required.

As can be seen from Table 4-3 (in the table, entrance examination group is represented by A, recommended admission group by B and study abroad group by C.), there was a significant difference (p<0.05) in the motivation of "The 'postgraduate-study craze' among peers around me prompts me to follow the trend and choose to pursue postgraduate studies" between the recommended admission group and the study-abroad group. As a form of domestic further study, postgraduate recommendation may, to a certain extent, be more inclined to follow the mainstream development path of the school and classmates around. Students in the recommended admission group may regard it as an excellent academic development path, so they are more likely to be influenced by the "postgraduate-study craze" around them. On the contrary, students who plan to study abroad may rely less on the choices of their peers around them. Their decision on whether to pursue further studies at the postgraduate level is more based on personal development plans, interests, and the demand for educational resources abroad. Therefore, they show stronger independence in behavioral decision-making and are less likely to be influenced by the behaviors of the surrounding group.

Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-5 Multiple Comparisons LSD

Dependent Variable	(I) Pathway	(J) pathway	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
'postgraduate-study craze'	A	B	-0.41905	0.51605	0.419	-1.4475	0.6094
		C	0.91667	0.58413	0.121	-0.2475	2.0808
	B	A	0.41905	0.51605	0.419	-0.6094	1.4475
		C	1.33571*	0.52405	0.013*	0.2913	2.3802
	C	A	-0.91667	0.58413	0.121	-2.0808	0.2475
		B	-1.33571*	0.52405	0.013*	-2.3802	-0.2913

Emotional Experiences Across Pathways

Thematic Analysis of Emotional Expressions

This study has identified seven themes and nineteen sub-themes regarding the emotional experiences of Chinese English major undergraduates during their preparation for further education, which are influenced by their motivations for pursuing advanced studies.

This study analyzed the emotions of students during the process of further education and found that these emotions mainly covered three types: positive, negative, and neutral. Among the interviewees, AB belonged to the recommended-for-postgraduate-study group, CD belonged to the study-abroad group, and EF belonged to the postgraduate entrance examination group. It can be directly seen from Figure 4-1 that positive emotions reflect the positive feelings such as emotional empowerment, growth and happiness that students experience in the process of continuing education. Negative emotions represent negative feelings such as avoidance, fatigue and tension. Neutral emotions represent the relatively calm and transitional emotional states of students.

During the process of English major students choosing to pursue postgraduate studies, their emotions exhibit complex and diverse characteristics. As can be clearly seen from the word cloud (Figure 4-2), words such as "Anxiety", "Sadness", "Suffering", and "Exhaustion" are larger and more prominent in font size. This indicates that negative emotions occupy a significant position in this process. At the same time, positive words like "Excitement", "Resilience", and "Purposefulness" also appear in the word cloud.

Overall, for English major students in the process of choosing to continue their postgraduate studies, there are not only negative emotions arising from pressure and setbacks but also positive emotions stemming from their anticipation of the future and their own beliefs. It is a complex emotional experience process interwoven with

challenges and hopes.

In Figure 4-3, taking Student D from the study-abroad group as an example, he showed a strong positive emotion (with an emotional intensity of 22) during the process of further education. This indicates that during the preparation for studying abroad, Student D might have received a lot of positive incentives in aspects such as successful application and adapting to the rhythm of preparation. For example, as Student D said in the interview,

"When the final draft was completed, I thought it was great. This version I wrote was simply excellent."
"At the beginning, I mainly tried to understand the backgrounds of those who had successfully applied in previous years. I learned that although it was difficult, for students from our school, with good academic performance and scientific research achievements, it was not completely impossible."

"At that time, because I got this information, I still had 50% confidence in my heart. So I thought that as long as I was willing to put in the effort and keep working at it, the probability of my success in the end was still very high."
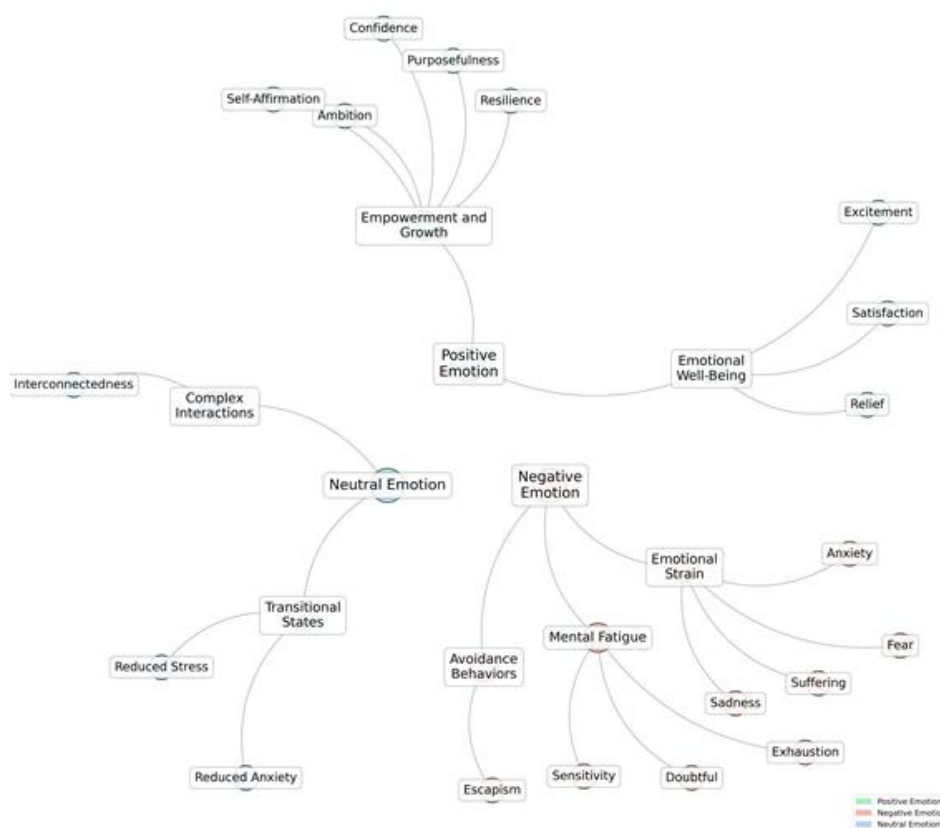

Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-1 Positive, Negative, and Neutral Emotions Classification Chart

Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-2 Emotion Words Cloud Map

In contrast, student B in the recommended admission group had a higher intensity of negative emotions, reaching 15, and fewer positive emotions. This indicates that student B might have encountered significant setbacks or stressors during the process of being recommended for postgraduate studies, and was in a relatively negative emotional atmosphere. For instance, as student B mentioned in the interview,

"I spent more than ten hours a day working at my station, pushing myself extremely hard."
"So that psychological process was the most tormenting for me."
"Indeed, during the competition, I did get exposed to more cutting-edge fields, and in fact, I developed more feelings of uncertainty and doubt about my major."

Student E from the entrance examination group has a positive emotion intensity of 8, a negative emotion intensity of 7, and a neutral emotion intensity of 0, indicating that his emotions are in a relatively balanced state. This reflects that during the preparation period for the postgraduate entrance examination, the positive and negative factors had a relatively similar impact on his emotions, preventing him from having a significant bias towards either the positive or negative end of the emotional spectrum. For instance, as Student E mentioned in the interview,

"I have an attitude towards the postgraduate entrance examination that it's okay whether I pass or not, so I can calmly accept any result."

"I would carefully check where I made mistakes and correct them. After making progress, my emotions became more stable."

"Later, I didn't have too many emotional fluctuations regarding these grades."

Emotional Differences among Different Pathways
In the study exploring the emotional experiences of English major students during their pursuit of further education, the emotional heat map (Figure 4-4) provides us with an intuitive perspective to gain insights into the emotional states of different students.
The figure indicates that among students preparing for postgraduate entrance exams, applying for postgraduate studies through recommendation, and planning to study abroad, negative emotions such as anxiety (N_anxiety) and suffering (N_suffering) are quite prominent. This shared negative sentiment suggests that regardless of the chosen path for further education, students are under considerable pressure. Students preparing for the postgraduate entrance exam face fierce competition and heavy review tasks. As student E put it,
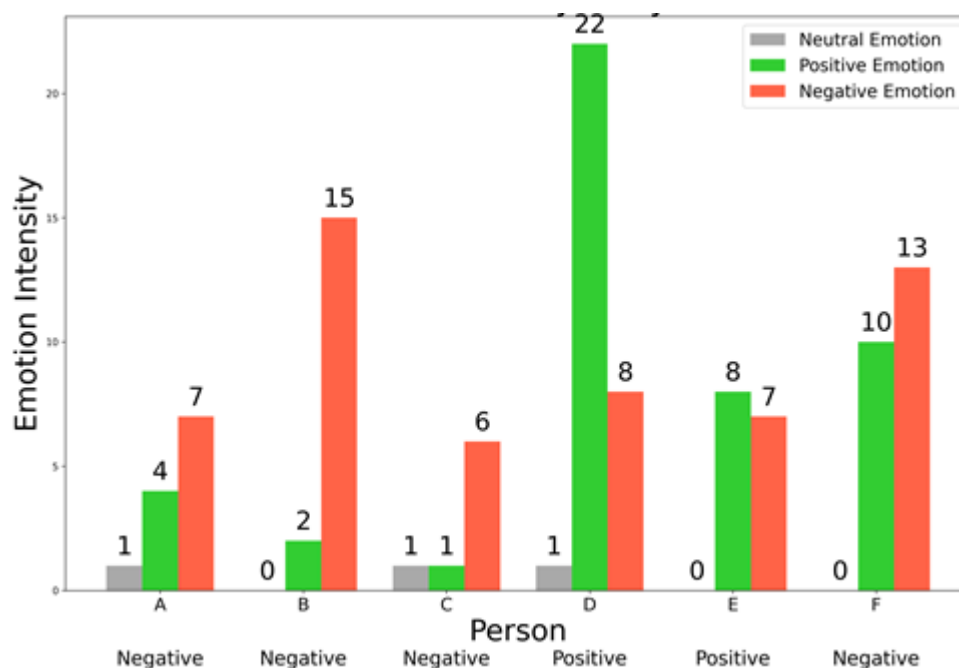
Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-3 Analysis of the Main Emotion of Each Student

"But if I don't complete a large amount of tasks on that day, it will intensify my anxiety."
"Preparing for the exam is tiring, hard, and depressing."

Student F said,
"During the middle stage, especially during the summer vacation, because our major requires an internship, and if we have to do the internship during the day, we may have less time or even no time at all to prepare for the postgraduate entrance examination in the evening. I was very annoyed and anxious during that period, feeling that I was falling behind in my progress."

The negative emotion of the recommended admission group mainly comes from the process of competition for recommendation, because they need to maintain excellent academic performance during the undergraduate period and actively participate in scientific research projects to compete for the limited number of postgraduate candidates. Student A said,

"My main concern is my performance. When I saw that I had a few relatively low scores, I put a lot of pressure on myself."

Student B said,
"I think this time is the second semester of sophomore year. My foundation in French as a second foreign language was not very good at the time, and there was a 4-credit course in which I fell far behind. I was really anxious at that time."

Students planning to study abroad deal with language tests, preparing application materials, worries about the unknown overseas life, as student C said, "I'm 50% anxious and 50% confident." Student D said, "It was a real pain when dealing with documents and writing samples." Behind these stressors, it is reflected that they are all pursuing better academic and career development, which echoes the academic pursuit and career development motivation reflected in the ANOVA, indicating that the basic motivation has a consistent impact on their emotional experience.

At the same time, excitement (P_Excitement), as a positive emotion, is also present among different groups. Students preparing for the postgraduate entrance examination feel a sense of accomplishment after completing the review of important subjects.

Student F said,
"During the preparation process, I feel happy, maybe when I do the exercises well, I will feel a bit excited."

Students recommended for postgraduate studies are passionate when participating in the assessment after obtaining the recommended postgraduate qualification. As student A said, "I think during the summer camp period, to put it bluntly, I was a bit excited."

Students planning to study abroad are expectant after confirming their study-abroad goals. Student D said, "During this process, a more appropriate word for how I felt at that time should be ambition. Anyway, I was very expectant and well-prepared, and my heart was full of anticipation and excitement. This included when I joined Professor Cheng's group later and we conducted some research."

All of these can generate the emotion of excitement. This indicates that they are all full of expectations for their future further study life and eager to realize their self-worth in a new academic environment, further proving the similarity of their motivations for seeking knowledge and exploration and achievement pursuit.

The motivation for further study drives students to make behavioral choices, and the various emotions they experience in the pursuit of their further study goals, in turn, affect their perseverance and adjustment of these motivations. Students on different further study paths, when facing similar pressures and challenges, all experience similar negative emotions. This indicates that they encounter similar difficulties on the path of academic progress and career development, and all have a strong desire to overcome these difficulties and achieve their goals. This common psychological experience and behavioral manifestation reflects the essential commonality of their motivations for further study
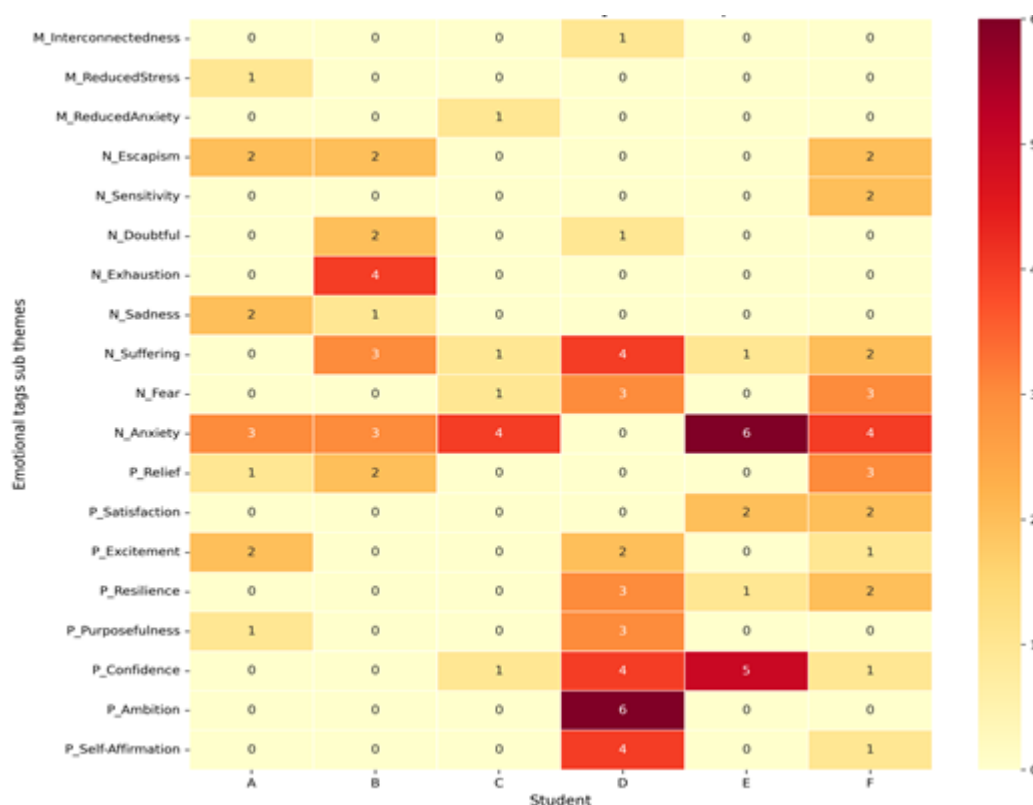

Figure **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-4 Emotional Intensity Heat Map

Interaction of Motivations and Emotions
Emotional Analysis of the Recommended Admission Group
Compared with other two groups, the mean score of students recommended for postgraduate studies is relatively high in achievement pursuit motivation (4.91±1.43). According to the achievement motivation theory (McClelland, 1985), individuals with a high achievement motivation desire to do things more perfectly and achieve greater success. For students in recommended admission group, successfully obtaining the recommendation for postgraduate studies is a manifestation of the achievements they have made through their previous efforts. At this time, they often experience a strong sense of relief. As student A said,

"I feel like a huge stone in my heart has settled down. I feel more at ease now that I've got the quota. I'm not

particularly anxious. At least, I'm guaranteed to have a postgraduate school to attend."

Student B also said,
"I don't have to spend more than ten hours a day working at my station, pushing myself extremely hard. I think it's more of a sense of relief rather than joy."

However, when they encounter academic difficulties and the research progress is not smooth, failing to reach their expected achievement goals, they will experience intense emotions of anxiety (N_Anxiety). Fortunately, this emotion is less intense in the postgraduate entrance examination group and the study-abroad group. Such emotional fluctuations stem from their high attention to and pursuit of their own achievements. Once there is a gap between reality and expectations, it is easy to cause a psychological disparity. Student A spoke plainly in the interview that, "The result was also very unsatisfactory."

Student A also said,
"I'm mainly anxious about my grades. When I see that I have a few relatively low grades, I put a lot of pressure on myself."

"The anxiety makes me, for example, suffer from a bit of insomnia, or keep thinking about the final result repeatedly."

In the dimension of family and external expectation motivation, students recommended for postgraduate studies scored (5.46±1.63), which is higher than that of the other two groups. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) emphasizes that an individual's behavior and emotions are influenced by the surrounding environment and the expectations of others. Driven by family and social expectations, students recommended for postgraduate studies will gain a sense of honor and belonging when they meet these external expectations, feeling that their efforts have been recognized.

However, if they fail to meet the expectations, such as having unsatisfactory academic performance or poor scientific research achievements, they will bear tremendous psychological pressure and experience feelings of guilt and anxiety. As student A said in the interview,

"This matter has been weighing on my mind for a long time. I feel as if my best state hasn't been recognized, and it's really disappointing and deeply engraved in my memory."

Student B also said,
"So I think that psychological process was the most tormenting. You might hear rumors every day that you're qualified, but the next day you might be replaced."

They are worried about failing to live up to their families' expectations and afraid of being questioned by the outside world. This excessive focus on external evaluation makes their emotional reactions more intense when facing academic setbacks. This is the reason for the high emotional intensity of suffering and exhaustion in the recommended admission group.

Emotional Analysis of Study Abroad Group

The motivations of the group of students studying abroad are relatively scattered, with a large standard deviation, reflecting significant individual differences. The motivation of learning interest (4.15±1.86) is relatively low and has a large degree of dispersion, indicating that some students do not choose to study abroad solely based on a strong professional interest. The motivation of family and external expectations also influences students' decisions to some extent, and the degree of influence varies significantly among different students. The diversity of these motivations and individual differences have become important factors contributing to the emotional differences among this group during the pre-study-abroad learning stage. It is precisely because of the diversity of motivations that the diversity of emotional types is observed in the heat map.

During the process of preparing to study abroad, students in the study-abroad group (CD) exhibited many positive emotions with relatively high intensity, such as P_Self-affirmation, P_Ambition, P_Confidence, P_Resilience, P_Purposefulness, and P_Excitement. Most notably, emotions such as self-affirmation and confidence stem from students' recognition of their choice to study abroad and the phased achievements they have made during the preparation process. For example, when students successfully overcome difficulties in language learning, or when their carefully written personal statements are affirmed by teachers or professionals while preparing application materials, they will believe that they have the ability to achieve their study-abroad goals, thus generating emotions of self-affirmation and confidence. As student D said that,

"When the final draft was completed, I thought it was great. This version I wrote was simply excellent and incomparable."

"During this continuous improvement process, instead, I felt that each version was better than the previous one. The more time and effort I spent and the more directions I explored, the better it became. So, in the process of continuous revision, I kept giving myself self-affirmation and positive feedback."

At the same time, the score of the motivation of family and external expectations (4.63±1.87) is relatively lower compared to the other two groups, indicating that the study-abroad group is less restricted by external expectations during the decision-making process and tends to make independent choices. This also leads to their inner desire to pursue postgraduate studies, and as a result, more positive emotions emerge during this process.

The relatively low score of learning interest motivation in the study-abroad group implies that some students choose to study abroad not out of a love for English major learning, but are influenced by other factors. During the preparation stage for studying abroad, they need to face a large number of learning tasks, such as language learning and preparation of professional knowledge. Due to the lack of internal interest as a driving force, these learning tasks often make them feel bored and difficult, and it is easy for them to develop emotions of suffering.

The tasks of preparing to study abroad are complex and come with enormous pressure. Students need to simultaneously cope with various challenges, including language exams, improvement of academic performance, and preparation of application materials. Language learning requires them to reach a high level in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which demands a substantial investment of time and energy. At the same time, preparing academic materials, such as writing personal statements and recommendation letters, also requires a high level of comprehensive abilities from students.

In this process, the relatively low score of the motivation of family and external expectations in the study-abroad group means that they may not receive sufficient external support and understanding when facing difficulties. Compared with the recommended-for-postgraduate-study group and the postgraduate entrance examination group, when they encounter setbacks in their studies and lives, they are less likely to receive direct help and encouragement from their families and the outside world. They need to bear the pressure alone to a greater extent, which leads to an increase in the intensity of their emotions of suffering.

Emotional Analysis of Entrance Examination Group
On the emotional heat map, for students preparing for the postgraduate entrance examination represented by EF during the preparation stage, the areas related to anxiety emotions (such as N_Anxiety) have a darker color. This is because the competition for the postgraduate entrance examination is fierce and the preparation tasks are arduous. With the intensification of employment competition and the popularization of higher education, the "postgraduate entrance examination fever" has continued to heat up in recent years, and the number of applicants for the postgraduate entrance examination has continued to rise. The 2022 National Master's Graduate Enrollment Survey Report shows that since 2016, the number of applicants for master's degrees in China has entered a stage of rapid growth. Students are worried that they will not be able to reach the admission score line of their desired institutions, which will in turn affect their future career development. They are under great psychological pressure and need to invest a large amount of time and energy in studying every day. The long-term intense study easily makes them feel fatigued, and the uncertainty of the examination results exacerbates their anxiety. However, driven by the hope of achieving a breakthrough in their future career development, they also hold onto optimism. In the heat map, the area related to positive emotions of anticipation is also reflected to a certain extent. This anticipation stems from their desire for an improved career outlook after successfully passing the postgraduate entrance examination, which motivates them to persist in their preparation.

Although negative emotions such as anxiety and distress dominate, the areas related to P_confidence and P_satisfaction on the emotion heat map also show darker colors, indicating that students preparing for the postgraduate entrance examination also experience brief positive emotional experiences during the preparation period. When students achieve phased learning goals, such as solving a difficult problem, making progress in a mock exam, or receiving encouragement from others (such as affirmation from teachers or support from family), they will generate positive emotions. This will reignite their confidence in the success of the postgraduate entrance examination, making them feel that they are one step closer to their ideal career goals, and thus they will be highly motivated to invest in the preparation in the short term. As student E said,

"Because I complete some tasks every day. After finishing these tasks, I naturally won't feel sad or think that I haven't accomplished anything today. Instead, I will have a sense of satisfaction."

However, due to the continuous emergence of difficulties in the preparation process, such positive emotions are

often short-lived and will soon be replaced by negative emotions Student F said,

"Then, as I prepared more and more towards the later stage, based on my judgment of my own study progress, I felt very anxious. I thought I might not be able to pass the exam and might have to take it again the next year. That's the feeling."

Compared with students in the recommended-for-postgraduate-study group, students in the postgraduate entrance examination group have greater emotional pressure during the preparation period. Students in the recommended-for-postgraduate-study group obtain the recommended postgraduate qualification through their previous accumulation and do not need to experience the fierce competition of the postgraduate entrance examination. Their preparation process is relatively easy, and the levels of anxiety isrelatively low. Although students in the study-abroad group also face pressure when preparing for study-abroad applications, compared with students preparing for the postgraduate entrance examination, students studying abroad are less likely to experience the high level of anxiety brought about by examination competition.

In summary, the postgraduate preparation students showed emotional states dominated by negative emotions such as anxiety and fear, with occasional flashes of transient positive emotions. This emotional difference is closely related to the competition pressure of postgraduate entrance examination and the uncertainty of career development, and is different from the emotional experience of students in the postgraduate protection group and the overseas study group at the corresponding stage.

V. Discussion

Motivational Drivers and Pathway-Specific Differences
Interpretation of Key Motivations through Self-Determination Theory

From the perspective of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), different further education pathways are influenced by various motivations (Figure 5-1).[1] For students preparing for the postgraduate entrance examination, the strong career development motivation can be seen as an example of extrinsic motivation. In the highly competitive job market, undergraduate students majoring in English encounter numerous challenges when seeking suitable employment. Therefore, obtaining a postgraduate degree has become a means to enhance employability, which is an externally-driven behavior. This aligns with the category of extrinsic motivation in SDT, where individuals engage in an activity to gain external rewards or avoid negative consequences (Deci,1975; Deci & Ryan,1980).

For students planning to study abroad, the relatively scattered motivations and significant individual differences reflect a more complex motivational structure. Some students may choose to study abroad out of a desire for cultural experience and personal growth, which can be regarded as intrinsic motivation. They are driven by internal interests and the pursuit of self-actualization. This is consistent with the self-determination theory's emphasis on self-control, ego-involvement and internal rewards. However, the influence of family and external expectations also exists, indicating a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.
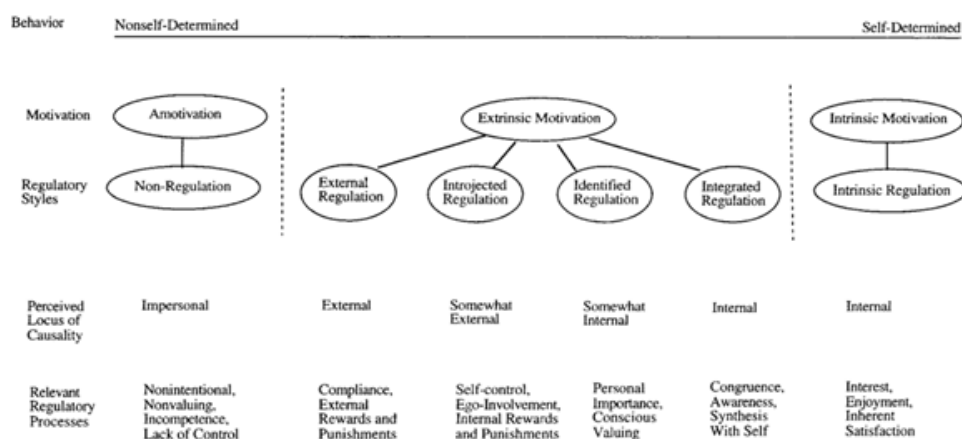

Figure 5-1 Delf-Determination Theory，SDT

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[1] Reprinted from Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). "Self-determination motivation theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being". American Psychologist, 55 (1), 68.

Sociocultural Factors Explaining Different Motivations across Pathways

Motivation does not operate in isolation but interacts with other motivations and contexts. Due to the interaction between environmental conditions and types of motivation, the development of language learners' motivation can be regarded as a complex and adaptive system. This finding is based on Papi and Hiver's (2020) research that according to Higgins (2014) global motivational dimensions, the motivational development of language learners is complex, as dynamic processes and adaptive or competitive interactions between value, control, and truth related motivations and the context in which they emerged resulted in specific motivational trajectories that shaped these learners' language-learning choices and experiences.

Value effectiveness is defined as "being successful in having what's desired" (Higgins, 2014, p. 49). It is related to successfully reaching a desired end state or outcome, including benefits versus costs, pleasure versus pain, and biological needs. Value focuses on what a person wants to achieve, regardless of how they want to achieve that outcome. In L2 motivation research, constructs such as future self and instrumental motivation fall into this category. Social and cultural factors play a significant role in shaping students' choices of continuing education paths. The influence of family expectations varies. For students recommended to pursue postgraduate studies, family expectations are often high, and they are motivated to strive for academic excellence to meet these expectations. This is evident from their high scores on the dimensions of family and external expectations motivation. In contrast, the group of students studying abroad is relatively less constrained by family expectations, thus enabling them to make more independent decisions.

Trends in the job market also influence student choices. For English majors, the fierce competition in the job market motivates them to seek ways to enhance their competitiveness. Regardless of whether the students in the postgraduate entrance examination group, the postgraduate guarantee group or the overseas study group, their main motivation for further study is career development motivation, which indicates that the demand for professional skills and qualifications in specific industries makes students believe that postgraduate study can provide them with necessary knowledge and skills to improve their employability.

Emotional Experiences in High-Stakes Decision-Making
Interpretation of Key Motivations through Perezhivanie

This study analyzes the prior L2 learning experiences of learners through the lens of Sociocultural Theory (SCT). Notably, the article develops Vygotsky's (1987) concept of perezhivanie, defining it as a specific emotional experience that is subsequently evaluated by the learner. When L2 learning experiences with emotional value are positively appraised in the affective domain, the related environmental factors within them attain a state of enlightenment.

As shown in Figure 5-2, perezhivanie posits that even if learners have the same second language learning experiences, their understanding and evaluation of these experiences will vary.2 Perezhivanie is regarded as a dynamic interaction of cognitive interpretation and emotional reflection shaped by social and cultural background. It emphasizes that learners' emotional responses to academic challenges are not static but are reconstructed through retrospective meaning-making, during which past experiences are reconstituted into "meaningful event texts" (Veresov & Mok, 2018). This process transforms the original emotional experience into "wisdom emotion" (Smagorinsky, 2011), and learners assess their own motivation and environmental pressure from the perspective of cognitive maturity.

Vygotsky's Social Cultural theory (SCT) puts the development of higher psychological functions in the dynamic interaction system between individuals and the objective social environment, and Perezhivanie as the core analysis unit of this interaction, reflects the role of social environment on individual development like a "psychological prism". In this process, cognition and emotion do not exist in isolation, but through the dynamic association of contradiction and unity (Figure 5-2), they jointly shape the emotional experience and motivation construction of individuals on the path to higher education.

Perezhivanie emphasizes that an individual generates experiences through the two-way interaction between their personality traits such as attention, perception, and memory and the social environment. For instance, the perception (cognitive aspect) of "employment competition pressure" by postgraduate entrance examination students and their anxiety (emotional aspect) are intertwined, forming a motivational explanation of "enhancing competitiveness through further education". This experience is not a static reflection, but a result of dynamic construction: when students observe the phenomenon of "rat race" (in Chinese called Neijuan) of their peers (objective environment), their selective attention (personality characteristics) will strengthen the cognition of "failure risk", and then activate anxiety, which will eventually be internalized into the motivation of "must break

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2 转载自孟亚茹（Meng, Y. R.）、张妍华（Zhang, Y. H.）和郗伎（Xi, J.）（2024）发表的《社会文化理论中 perezhivanie 概念的解析——兼谈外语教育整体观的路径探索》，载于《外语教学理论与实践》（Foreign Language Teaching: Theory and Practice）第 2 期，第 15 页。版权归原作者及期刊所有。

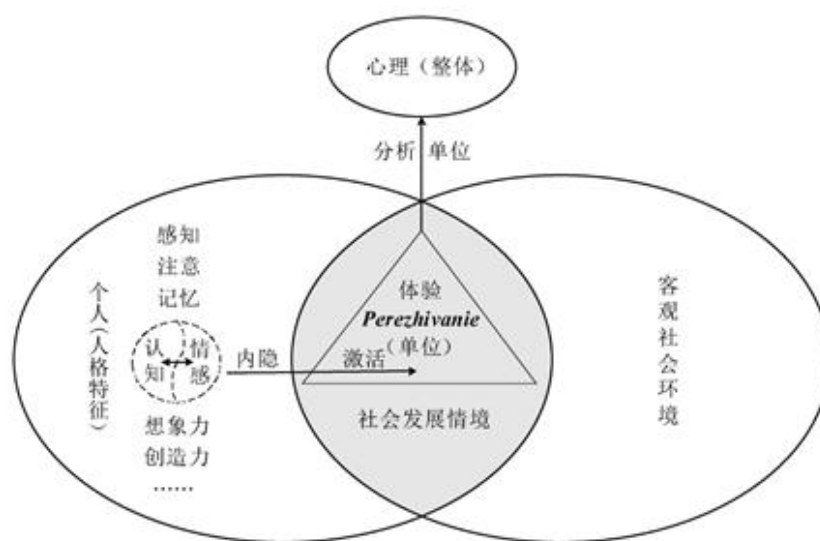through the career bottleneck through the entrance examination".

Figure 5-2 The Model of Perezhivanie

For the recommended admission group, the interaction between the school's postgraduate protection policy (objective environment) and the students' personality tendency of "pursuing social identity" makes them regard "obtaining postgraduate protection qualification" as "family honor and the proof of personal value", and this reconstruction of experience leads to their emotional sensitivity to "academic frustration" significantly higher than other groups.

All in all, the value of Perezhivanie is to reveal that the motivation to go to school is not a simple product of "environmental stimulation-individual response", but a dynamic system that is constantly reconstructed in the context of social development through the dialectical interaction between cognition and emotion. This perspective provides a key to understanding why different students have different motivations and emotional experiences in the same environment. The interaction among individual personality traits, past experiences and current situations is the deep mechanism of motivation formation.

How Different Pathways Shape Emotional Experiences

The structures of different further education pathways have a significant impact on students' emotional responses. In the case of recommended admission group, the uncertainty of whether one can obtain the recommendation and the high-pressure environment of maintaining excellent academic performance lead to complex emotions. Students may feel anxious during the process of competing for recommendation, and once they obtain the recommendation, they may feel a sense of relief, but at the same time, they also face the pressure of meeting external expectations.

For students planning to study abroad, the complex application process, including language tests, preparation of application materials, and concerns about adapting to a new environment, can trigger a variety of complicated emotions. The long and arduous preparation process may cause pain and exhaustion. However, the anticipation of experiencing a new culture and personal growth also brings positive emotions such as excitement and ambition.

The core motivation of the entrance examination group is "career development". Driven by a strong utilitarian goal, that is, seeking career development opportunities, their emotional regulation mechanism is compressed. Therefore, positive emotions lack stable internal triggers and are difficult to resist the continuous impact of structural pressure. This leads to the emotional sensitivity of postgraduates and even a tendency to escape from reality.

Synergy of Motivations and Emotions

Sociocultural theory suggests that social interaction is central to learning. (Vygotsky, 1987) Learning first occurs at the social level (interaction between people), and then is internalized into the individual psychological process. At the same time, activities are individual. Even if the task of the activity is the same, learners will form different activities because of different factors such as goals and motivations. Therefore, the subjective factors of learners must be considered. Vygotsky calls this "the path of development from society to the individual". In this study, we explore the interaction between motivation and emotion with the help of SCT. Although some English majors choose to continue to graduate school, their different motivations lead them to choose different paths for

further study, which results in different emotional experiences. It shapes students' persistence, adaptation and decision-making ability in different continuing education paths. This synergy is rooted in the dialectical relationship between cognitive goals (motivation) and affective states (emotion), and through the perspective of "perezhivanie", the two influence and shape each other.

On the one hand, motivation is the fundamental driving force that triggers and regulates emotional experiences. The career development motivation of postgraduate entrance examination students (such as participants E and F) can intensify negative emotions like anxiety and self-doubt, while the high risk of professional competitiveness can amplify the stress response. When the learning progress is consistent with the instrumental motivation (such as completing the learning goal), temporary positive emotions such as satisfaction will be generated, forming temporary emotional relief. The achievement motivation of the postgraduate protection group (such as participant A) gave rise to a dual emotional state, which was not only relieved by obtaining the postgraduate protection qualification, but also afraid of academic setbacks. Here, motivation was not only the source of emotional security to meet external expectations, but also the source of vulnerability to fear of poor performance. The motivation for cultural experience of overseas students (e.g. Participant D) will produce positive emotions such as excitement and self-affirmation when the learners perceive that the goal is consistent with the action (e.g., the successful completion of the document revision or the recognition of the institution), but it will also cause emotions such as suffering and exhaustion when the motivation conflicts with realistic challenges (e.g., language barriers, cumbersome application process).

On the other hand, emotion is not passively attached to motivation, but inversely regulates the strength and direction of motivation by acting on cognitive evaluation: the anxiety of postgraduate entrance examination students may cause the "narrowing effect" of motivation. For example, student F's excessive concern over the competition risk may temporarily waver his determination to take the postgraduate entrance examination and reduce his focus to long-term goals. However, for the postgraduate student B, anxiety over academic rankings may transform into sustained motivation, driving them to maintain high-intensity study. Positive emotions play a role in strengthening motivation. For example, the sense of self-affirmation that overseas student participant D experiences after multiple rounds of document revisions will strengthen the stability of his motivation for cultural experiences and make him more resilient under application pressure. Similarly, the sense of pride that postgraduates gain after being recognized in academic competitions will further solidify their identification with the academic path and enhance their achievement motivation.

This synergy between motivation and emotion indicates that students' choices regarding further education are not merely rational decisions but rather "cognitive-affective complexes" embedded within emotional experiences. For educators, understanding this synergy requires adopting three key approaches:

Firstly, motivational intervention should incorporate the emotional dimension. For instance, for postgraduate entrance examination candidates, stress management training can help establish a healthy connection between "motivation and emotion", preventing emotional exhaustion caused by excessive utilitarianism.

Secondly, emotional support should aim to clarify motivation. For recommended students (students recommended for exemption from the entrance examination) facing external expectation pressure, reflective activities (such as learning logs) can guide them to distinguish between "social expectations" and "self-goals", reducing cognitive conflicts in emotional experiences.

Thirdly, pathway guidance should focus on personal narratives. For diverse-motivated international students, cross-cultural adaptation workshops can help transform emotional experiences into resources for motivational integration (for example, redefining culture shock as an opportunity for cognitive expansion).

In summary, the synergy between motivations and emotions reveals the deep psychological logic in the process of continuing education-it is not merely a rational choice driven by goals, but a dynamic process of constantly attributing meaning through emotional experiences. This perspective provides a three-dimensional analytical framework for understanding students' perseverance, adaptation, and growth, while also offering a theoretical basis for designing differentiated educational support strategies.

VI. Conclusion

Verevsky and Mok (2018) conceptualized "perezhivanie" as a meta-experience; this increases the possibility of implementing regular educational interventions to stimulate each learner's unique experience. As Vygotsky (1935/1994) pointed out, the context or situation in past events may be the same for each learner, but as the learner's cognitive maturity increases, their understanding and evaluation of it may present qualitatively different dimensions. Thus, paths of inquiry education that require systematic longitudinal activity to recall past, memorable L2-related affective events and redefine their meaning in a learner's life can be designed to increase each learner's L2 learning motivation.

The study found that although students choose different paths for further education, they all face pressure and experience negative emotions such as anxiety and distress. At the same time, due to their expectations for

future studies, they also have positive emotions such as excitement, which reflects the fundamental commonality in their motivations for academic pursuit and career development. However, due to the different focuses of their motivations, there are significant differences in emotional experiences among different groups.

Students in the recommended-for-postgraduate-study group scored relatively high in achievement motivation and the motivation of family and external expectations. When they successfully obtain the recommendation for postgraduate studies, they will feel a sense of relief and relaxation. However, when they encounter academic setbacks, due to their high attention to their own achievements, they are prone to intense feelings of sadness. Moreover, being greatly influenced by family and social expectations, when their academic performance fails to meet these expectations, they will bear enormous psychological pressure and experience feelings of guilt and anxiety.

The motivations of the study-abroad group are rather scattered and there are significant individual differences. Some students, due to their recognition of their study-abroad choice and achieving phased results in the preparation process, have generated many positive emotions, such as self-affirmation and self-confidence, and the intensity of these emotions is relatively high. At the same time, because their motivation for learning interest is relatively low, the tasks of preparing to study abroad are complex, and they lack external support, they are prone to emotions of suffering when facing learning tasks.

Students in the postgraduate entrance examination group are influenced by a strong motivation for career development and have great emotional pressure during the preparation period, mainly characterized by negative emotions such as anxiety and self-doubt. Although short-lived positive emotions such as confidence and satisfaction will emerge when they achieve phased learning goals or receive encouragement from others, these positive emotions will soon be replaced by negative emotions, which is closely related to the competitive pressure of the postgraduate entrance examination and the uncertainty of career development.

In conclusion, the motivation for further education profoundly influences students' emotional experiences during the process of pursuing their goals for further education. Understanding the emotional differences among students in different pathways can help educators and parents provide more targeted support and guidance, enabling students to better cope with the pressures of continuing education and achieve their academic and career development goals.

Educational institutions should customize specialized counseling courses based on the motivational and emotional differences of students on different pathway of further education. For example, they can offer academic skills training and psychological adjustment courses for students recommended for postgraduate studies, provide subject tutoring, stress management, and career planning guidance for students preparing for the postgraduate entrance examination, and strengthen language training, offer full-service for study-abroad applications, and provide cross-cultural adaptation training for students planning to study abroad.

Parents should fully understand their children's pressure and emotional changes and provide sufficient mental support. For students recommended for admission, they should avoid overemphasizing grades and external recognition. For students preparing for the entrance examination, they should pay attention to their physical and mental health and create a relaxed atmosphere. For students planning to study abroad, parents should actively participate in the preparation process and cultivate their children's independent abilities.

Students themselves should also enhance their self-awareness, clarify their goals, reasonably plan their study and development paths, learn to regulate their emotions, actively expand their social circles to obtain support, and jointly face the challenges of further education in this way.

Although this study has made some discoveries about the emotional differences and the relationship with motivations among English major students during the processes of being recommended for postgraduate studies, preparing for the postgraduate entrance examination, and studying abroad, it still has certain limitations. On the one hand, the research sample is relatively small, consisting only of English major students from Xi'an Jiaotong University. Future research can expand the sample scope. On the other hand, the research method mainly relies on retrospective interviews and thematic analysis, which is subjective and easily limited and influenced by memory. In future research, the triangulation method can be used to integrate multiple data sources, such as interview records, questionnaires, diaries, etc., for mutual verification. At the same time, longitudinal tracking studies can be adopted to track the emotional changes of students throughout the process of further education.

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