What Goes on in Foreign Language Learners' Minds? Planning Research to Explore
EFL Motivation, EFL Anxiety and EFL Learning Strategies

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Abstract

Learning a foreign language is a complex task and one that is becoming more and more popular as the world becomes smaller. Within Taiwan, English is taught in elementary, middle and senior high schools as part of the compulsory education as well as in specialised courses in universities and cram schools. However, despite the intensity and breadth of English instruction, the language proficiency of Taiwanese English learners is highly variable and not improving. According to the Education First – English Proficiency Index, Taiwan has slipped from 25th ranking down to 30th. However, it is not just proficiency test results that can and should inform English teaching. What really goes on in the language learner's mind and how do these processes influence proficiency outcomes? Researchers have established that a wide range of factors influence learning proficiency including demographic factors such as age and gender, as well as pedagogical factors related to approaches to learning and teaching and prior education. This study explores three pedagogical factors in the adult language learning university context in Taiwan; language learning strategies, foreign language classroom anxiety, and foreign language motivation. This research posits that these factors may account for a greater portion of language learning proficiency variance. This paper explains the language teaching and learning context and its challenges, existing measures of motivation, learning strategies and anxiety used in language research and a proposed approach to research of these factors.

Introduction
English is taught as a foreign language within Taiwan generally starting in elementary school through to university. Furthermore, Taiwan has many educational institutions outside of the formal schooling system such as privately run cram schools that also teach English. However, despite all of the English teaching, Taiwan is ranked thirtieth for English proficiency worldwide (EnglishFirst, 2012). Furthermore, Taiwan has slipped from twenty-fifth position in the previous year of 2011. One of the reasons for the decline is that Taiwanese students' overall psychology towards learning English may have a negative influence on their English proficiency.

Experiences from my classroom
To begin with, I would like to provide context for the research problem by sharing some of my teaching experiences from my classroom that I hope may illustrate some of the diversity and the challenges that are evident in learning a foreign language.

The first experience revolves around a student who wishes to speak English perfectly, just like a native speaker. While communicating with this student, there are two actions that he does that impede his learning. The first action is that he will often say a few words into his sentence, stop, and then ask me how to complete the sentence properly as a native speaker would. Unfortunately, after a few words, he has not communicated enough of his meaning to determine what he wants to say, let alone help him phrase a proper English sentence. Usually after this first action, the next action is that he will usually utter in Chinese that *English is too difficult* and then want to give up trying. What could be going through his mind? One thought, and the student has mentioned this on numerous occasions to me, is that he wishes to speak English perfectly and immediately. The desire for perfection is also evident in his desire to achieve one hundred per cent for every single assessment and not achieving this means failure. The second thought that does not appear to be apparent to him is the unnecessary stress and anxiety that he manifests within himself. The student's desire to appear perfect may generate constant worry and also a sense that he is being constantly evaluated.

The second experience I would like to share is about a common theme that I have observed in my students' behaviour. One semester I decided to run a class activity where I asked the students to talk about about their goals and which professions they wanted to pursue after graduation. Interestingly, many of my students told me that they had no idea what they wanted to do. Rather puzzled, I asked them why they chose English as their major. They generally have two answers: a) their parents told them to, and b) their university entrance exam score was not high enough to be offered a position in a higher ranked university. Both of these explanations imply that students only chose English with resignation. As a result, it is often difficult to stimulate motivation within my students, as they seem more interested in the games they can play on Facebook and their cell phones.

The third experience I would like to share is about one student who has an overwhelming enthusiasm for learning English. The first example of this is during class time, when this student is called up to talk, she has a big smile on her face. She takes the microphone and starts talking, and talking, and talking, and talking. In fact, it is difficult to stop her talking because she appears to enjoy it so much. Another example is when I have seen her around the university campus, she immediately

approaches me dragging her friends along and then instructs them to speak to me using English. Her friends usually look a little uncomfortable. Then immediately after I have spoken a sentence, she will translate it to Chinese so her friends can understand. The third example worth mentioning is a piece of writing she gave to me for reading. While reading it, I had to have an English dictionary with me because she likes to swap common English words for unusual words that she has remembered from word maps. I deliberately used the word *remembered* and not *looked up* because it would appear that she has a photographic memory and likes to use it.

The fourth experience I would like to share is about one student who when I first taught him about a year ago, he did not want to communicate in English. Often the conversations followed the pattern of me speaking in English, he looking very confused. I repeated the English sentence again very slowly and clearly, and then I would have to communicate using my broken Chinese. Recently, he attended an English Corner session that I hosted and he asked, using English, if I remembered him. Initially, I didn't remember, but after a few weeks I remember him from the previous year. Now, he regularly comes to the English Corner that I host, rarely relies on using Chinese, and even has developed the ability to spell English words based on their sounds. This skill he has developed when other students have not.

These scenarios help outline the variable language learning issues evident in Taiwanese classes that problematize my teaching and provide incentive for the research proposed in this paper.

English within Taiwan
To communicate using English is an important skill that Taiwan appears to value. This is evident by English being taught in elementary, junior, and senior high schools, not to mention the numerous cram schools that teach or specialize in English, and finally the university courses available. Although there are many opportunities for the Taiwanese to learn English, as previously mentioned, Taiwan has recently and significantly slipped in the world rankings of English proficiency EnglishFirst (2012). If Taiwan places a high importance on learning English, and there are so many opportunities for Taiwanese to learn English and improve their proficiency, why has Taiwan dropped in the world rankings? Some possible reasons could be that other countries that have jumped ahead of Taiwan by adopting fresh approaches and/or materials that have promoted more effective learning outcomes in English. Or alternatively, Taiwan has regressed in its pedagogical capacity resulting in more limited outcomes in English proficiency. Rather than analyse the reasons why Taiwan has slipped in the English proficiency ranks, it may be more productive to look at factors that affect English learning within a Taiwanese context.

There are many opportunities for the Taiwanese to learn English, and this generally occurs within a classroom. Students that attend English classes may do so for a variety of reasons including parental influence, inadequate university entrance exam scores for target courses, uncertainty about future career prospects or a belief that English will make them a more attractive job applicant in the future. Chamot (2004) suggested some more generalised reasons such as academic purposes, travel or survival.

Factors that may have an effect on English language proficiency may be personal traits such as personality, learning styles, learning strategies, anxiety and attitudes, just to name a few. This leads us to the question: *what goes in the mind of the EFL learner*? Questions similar to this have motivated researchers to search for answers generally focusing on one aspect or factor of the teaching and learning context. Over the last 30 years, there appears to be an increasing trend to focus on different learning factors such as motivation, learning strategies and anxiety and these are the three factors that I will focus on.

Foreign Language Anxiety

Anxiety is "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 125). Horwitz et al. (1986) found that foreign language learning anxiety has unique characteristics that are not found in other types of anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) have also stated that foreign language learning anxiety is "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (p. 284). Some of the symptoms of foreign language anxiety may be avoiding situations that cause anxiety such as skipping class, or not completing homework (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Research prior to the late 1970's that examined anxiety and its relationship to learning a foreign language revealed that it was neither simple or well-understood and this is in part due to the lack of consistency between anxiety measuring instruments (Scovel, 1978). During the mid to late 1970's, research revealed that anxiety has different aspects and that has led to various theories. Kleinmann (1977) and Chastain (1975) suggested that anxiety might have a facilitating effect or a debilitating effect on language learning outcomes. Chastain (1975) pointed out "some concern about a test is a plus while too much anxiety can produce negative results" (P.160). Kleinmann's (1977) research demonstrates this theory in finding that learners with high levels of anxiety (debilitating) tended to avoid synaptic structures that contrasted most with their own native language. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) also suggested that facilitating anxiety appears to have a positive influence on language learning whereas debilitating anxiety has a negative effect.

Spielberger, Gorsuch, and Lushene (1970), investigated the differences between state and trait anxiety. State anxiety is defined as being a "transitory emotional state or condition of the human organism that is characterised by subjective, consciously perceived feelings of tension and apprehension and heightened autonomic nervous system activity" (p.3). Trait anxiety is defined as being a "relatively stable individual differences in anxiety proneness" (p.3). Trait anxiety represents how individuals respond differently to stressful situations and has been found to be consistent over time.

With no clear definition or a reliable instrument to measure foreign language learning anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) undertook research that led to their Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Understanding more about foreign language anxiety, particularly if it can facilitate language learning, as well as its relationship with other affective factors could lead to helping learners understand themselves and increase their language proficiency. Higher achievement is something that most, if

not all, Taiwanese students desire and addressing language learning anxiety may assist them meet their goals.

The FLCAS has three subscales that consist of comprehension anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. Comprehension anxiety is the fear of communicating with other students or a teacher using the foreign language. Fear of negative evaluation is the fear that other people (not necessarily confined to the classroom) will think negatively of the speaker. Test anxiety is the fear of participating in any type of quiz or exam (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Reflecting back on the first scenario about my classroom experiences, the student who wishes to speak English perfectly may be subjecting himself to more anxiety than necessary. Some anxiety would probably help him to improve, but his constant fear of negative evaluation may push his anxiety to a debilitating level.

Foreign Language Motivation
Motivation is the desire to do something (Ryan & Deci, 2000) with an expectation of some value for the effort spent (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995). Motivation also must have a goal, a desire to reach the goal, a positive attitude towards learning how to achieve the goal, and behaviour that moves the person toward the goal (Gardner, 1985). From the opening stories about some of my students, there are different aspects of motivation, or lack of motivation, that can be observed. The second scenario of students studying English because their parents told them to, or they couldn't get into a higher ranked university, or they chose to major in English because their grade didn't allow them to another area, might suggest that they don't really have any motivation at all. This type of motivation has been described by Ryan and Deci (2000) as amotivational, meaning the learner is neither motivated nor not motivated.

One of the researchers who appears most dominant in the motivation area is Robert Gardner with work on the topic that dates back to Lambert in the early 1970s. Over the years, Gardner (1985, 2005) has developed his socio-educational model that examines motivation from an instrumental and integrative perspective. Instrumental motivation is described as desiring the rewards that an action can bring with two examples being increased job opportunities and meeting requirements to graduate. Integrative motivation is the desire to integrate oneself into the target culture by adapting parts of it into one's identity and an example of this may be my Taiwanese students using their English name where they can. Gardner's socio-educational model also covers other components that include orientation towards the target language, attitudes towards the learning situation, and anxiety.

There have also been other researchers with their own theories regarding motivation with two influential examples following. The first theory is Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985, as cited by Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991); Ryan and Deci (2000)). The SDT is based on two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. Tasks that are considered fun, enjoyable, or interesting are considered intrinsic motivation. Tasks that are done for utilitarian purposes, even if they are not interesting, are considered extrinsic. These theoretical understandings were modified in 2000, when Ryan and Deci (2000) proposed amotivational theory as discussed above. The second branch of motivation theory is Expectancy-Value theory proposed by Eccles and Wigfield (1995); Wigfield and

Eccles (2000) who suggested that there are four components of motivation consisting of attainment value, intrinsic value, extrinsic utility value, and cost. Attainment value is the individual's perception of how important a given task is. Intrinsic value is the pleasure that the individual enjoys while completing the task. Extrinsic value is the perceived usefulness of completion of a task in relation to the individual's future goals. Cost is the perceived negative consequences of completing the task that includes not only financial cost, but also physical and emotional cost.

Self-determination theory and the expectancy-value theory have been examined within a general education environment. Whereas, the socio-educational model has been examined within a second language acquisition environment. Despite the fact that English is still considered a foreign language in Taiwan, and not a second language, the socio-educational model seems more appropriate for the following reasons. Firstly, its development was specifically based in second/foreign language acquisition contexts and not in a general setting as was adopted in development of the self-determination and expectancy-value theories. Even though English is not a second language in Taiwan, Taiwanese students have many opportunities to interact with the English language and culture. Secondly, motivation is a complex phenomenon and the socio-educational model appears to offer a more holistic approach. Thirdly, the AMTB has been used in many studies around the world and found to be useful, reliable and relevant to identifying the components of learner motivation as well as the impact of motivation on learning outcomes (Gardner, 2001).

Foreign Language Learning Strategies,
Learning strategies are the "special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 1) and are procedures that facilitate learning especially at the novice stage (Chamot, 2005). Learning strategies assist the learners to move towards their goals through taking conscious actions (Oxford, 1990) such as Taiwanese students memorising exactly what their teachers have said. However, for learning strategies to be effective, they must be appropriate for the contextual situation (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) otherwise they may, in fact, be a hindrance.

Language learning strategies should be problem-oriented, encourage the learners to become more self-directed, be flexible and involve more of the learner than just his/her cognition. In addition, learning strategies should help the learner organise and integrate the new knowledge, they may also have an effect on the learner's motivational or affective state (Weinstein & Mayer, 1983). These strategies may seem strange to Taiwanese undergraduate students who have become accustomed to the authoritarian teaching methods of their youth. Therefore, an additional characteristic should be that the strategies are also teachable (Oxford, 1990). The learning skill that the student from my fourth scenario has learned, to spell words from their sounds, is interesting for several reasons. The first reason is very few other students have this ability. Therefore, where, how, and who did he learn this skill from? The second reason is that, if this student learned the skill, can it be taught to other students?

One of the more popular instruments used to measure how many and how often learning strategies are used is Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The SILL has six categories of strategies that consist of mnemonics,

cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective, and social. Mnemonics strategies concern adopting different ways to remember, for example using pictures and semantic maps. Cognitive strategies involve how the learner interacts with and processes new information, for example, practicing, repeating new words and searching for patterns. Compensation strategies involve deploying different methods to communicate when there are unknown gaps in the target language, for example, using gestures. Meta-cognitive strategies involve planning to improve and practice the target language, for example, seeking out native speakers and engaging in language exchange. Affective strategies involve managing one's own emotions, for example, relaxing and positive self-talk. Social strategies are interacting with others, for example, asking questions and practicing with other students.

Proposed method for research

This study is designed to examine the relationships between the three selected factors (foreign language learning strategies, foreign language anxiety, or foreign language motivation) and determine which factor or combination of factors is the best predictor of foreign language learning achievement for Taiwanese undergraduate students.

Several methods can be used to research educational phenomena. Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen (2010) describe qualitative research methods as examining the contextual setting with no attempt to predict the future in order to produce a rich account of the events. On the other hand, quantitative research methods make an attempt to predict the future by determining the dependant factors associated with the phenomenon under examination by testing the relationships. After the analysis has taken place, the conclusion will be formed by deductive reasoning and dictated by the statistical analysis of the results.

This study aims to examine the relationships between several factors: foreign language anxiety, foreign language learning strategies and motivation to learn a foreign language and attempts to predict which factors individually or collectively have the greatest influence on foreign language achievement. The three main instruments to be used in this study have been extensively developed, tested and implemented in a variety of language learning situations and found to be fit for purpose and highly reliable. See Oxford (1986); Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) for the SILL, Aida (1994); Cao (2011) for the FLCAS, and Ho (1998). Therefore, it is deemed appropriate that a quantitative research methodology deploying established survey instruments should be used for this study.

For this study, the three instruments are all questionnaires that require the participants to self-report using a Likert scale. It is anticipated that the results will allow a close examination of the relationships between several factors: foreign language anxiety, foreign language learning strategies and motivation to learn a foreign language. Data from the survey instruments and a proficiency test will be analysed using PASW (formally known as SPSS). An enhanced understanding of correlations between these factors and language proficiency will provide evidence for predictions about which factor individually or collectively has the greatest influence on foreign language achievement. Such understandings can greatly assist language teachers who encounter learning issues similar to those common in Taiwanese classrooms.

Descriptive statistics

In order to adequately analyse the data several procedures will be implemented to establish validity and reliability.

The next set of data analysis procedures that will be run will be descriptive analysis to show the profile of the sample used. The information to be shown will be the median, frequency distribution and standard deviation of the participants' age, gender, study major and number of years studying English. In addition to the demographics descriptive analysis, procedures will be run to show participants' median level of anxiety, use of language learning strategies, motivation to learn a foreign language and foreign language achievement at that particular point in time when the data collection will be taken. The independent factors each have their own sub-scales and they will also be included in the descriptive analysis.

After the descriptive analysis procedures have been ran, the next set will be Pearson's correlation coefficient. As mentioned earlier, the independent factors have their own respective sub-scales and each of these will be compared for any statistically significant relationship between the sub-scales of there the other independent factors. For example, the FLCAS has three sub-scales (communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety), the four sub-scales of the AMTB (integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation, motivation, and instrumental orientation), and the six sub-scales of SILL (memory, cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective, and social) will all be completed against each other. The final Pearson's correlation coefficient will be compared against each of the sub-scales and foreign language achievement.

The next sets of procedures to be run are inferential statistical procedures that they will test for impact and predictive nature of the independent variables on the dependant, that being foreign language achievement.

Inferential statistics

The set of inferential statistical procedures to be run are multiple regression analysis. There are two parts that will be completed. The first type multiple regression analysis using the "enter" method with collinearity diagnostics included. Any factor that shows a value of more 10 in the variance inflation factor (VIF) will be removed. This will show the impact that each of the independent variables will have on the dependent variable. That being the impact of foreign language anxiety, and/or foreign language learning strategies, and/or motivation to learn a foreign language will have on the foreign language achievement. The second multiple regression analysis to be run will be using the "the stepwise" method. This will show the predictive nature of each independent variable has on the dependent.

Why this study is important

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, English is taught throughout the Taiwanese education system, yet Taiwan has slipped in the world rankings. The dynamics of teaching English in a classroom is a combination of many factors. Previous research that has focused on specialised areas that has helped gained an insight into a part of the language learners' psychology. Three areas that have been discussed are anxiety in the foreign language classroom, motivation to learn a foreign language, and language learning strategies. Individually, these factors have guided

researchers over the years. Now that these factors and instruments have been proven measures, maybe it is time to combine the power of these factors together and seek to reveal more of the holistic picture of foreign language acquisition.

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