學生對成功英語學習者的看法及其對教學的啟示

陳彩虹[*]

摘要

本文探討英語學習者對成功學習及其所意識到自身能力不足處的看法。此項研究對台灣一所大學 109 位新生進行了問卷調查，其中 14 人並接受了焦點小組訪談。問卷結果顯示，學生所列出促成成功學習的因素多為情意相關因素，且學生把這些因素列成遠重要於其它因素(包括語言天賦和學習策略)。後續的焦點訪談結果則是突顯出學生感到自身對社會語言學知識的缺乏及其英語口說焦慮。此研究的發現將可幫助英語教學工作者改進其教學規劃。

關鍵詞：英語為外語學習者、學習者信念、好的學習者

[*] 國立政治大學外文中心助理教授

Students' Perspective on What It Takes to Be an Effective Language Learner: How Can It Guide Teaching Practice?

Chen, Rainbow Tsai-Hung[*]

Abstract

This study examined EFL learners' views on what it takes to effectively learn a language and their own perceived deficiencies as learners. In the study, 109 freshmen at a Taiwanese university were surveyed, and 14 of them were interviewed in focus groups. Among the factors they listed in the questionnaire, the students perceived a variety of affect-related factors as more important for successful learning than other factors they added low on the list such as aptitude and learning strategies. The follow-up focus group interviews then highlighted the students' perceived deficiencies as a lack of sociolinguistic knowledge, and also anxiety when speaking. It was concluded in the paper that knowing the information gleaned from this research could help instructors improve their teaching practices.

Key words: EFL, learner beliefs, good language learners

[*] Assistant professor, Foreign Language Center, National Chengchi University

Students' Perspective on What It Takes to Be an Effective Language Learner: How Can It Guide Teaching Practice?

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1. Introduction

Over the past four decades, studies of effective learning have matured as an established research area. In particular, researchers have investigated a wide array of factors that contribute to the making of a good language learner (GLL), including learning strategies, motivation, learning styles, metacognition, autonomy, and innate factors such as age, gender, aptitude and personality (see Griffiths, 2008). In examining these factors, the studies typically focused on the learners identified by their teachers or the researchers as successful (or unsuccessful) learners (e.g., Green & Oxford, 1995; Vann & Abraham, 1990; Wen & Johnson, 1997). Put another way, this literature has tended to define a "good" learner from teachers' or researchers' perspectives. While this approach has indeed provided language instructors with enormous insights into what GLLs think and do in their learning processes, hence helping language instructors improve their pedagogy, so far, we know little about the average learner's beliefs about a GLL. Understanding learner beliefs is important, as these beliefs affect the ways a learner interprets and tackles a learning task (Benson & Lor, 1999; Cotterall, 1999). This study therefore sought to explore the notion of a GLL from the perspective of Taiwanese English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners, regardless of whether the participants were considered successful learners or not. A second aim of the study was to understand the participants' perceived deficiencies in their own learning that hindered them from being a successful learner as they defined it.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Notion of the Good Language Learner

The notion of the good language learner has received considerable attention in second language acquisition (SLA) research since the 1970s, with studies by Rubin (1975), Stern (1975) and Naiman, Frölich, Stern and Todesco (1978, 1995). Findings generated in the early GLL studies were by and large similar, and have held up well over time (see Ellis, 2008; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). For example, based on observations of students and conversations with students and teachers, Rubin (1975) found a good language learner demonstrated a number of characteristics such as being willing to guess, communicate, and make mistakes; attending to form in a particular way (such as analyzing and synthesizing) as well as to meaning; and monitoring their own learning. Naiman et al.'s (1978, 1995) study concluded that attitudes towards language learning, persistence, and willingness to adapt to varied learning situations were vital for adult language learners. While emphasizing "the successful or good language learner, with predetermined overall characteristics, does not exist" and that learning strategies only accounted for a part of language learning (p.224), Naiman et al. identified five learning strategies for successful second/foreign language learning, namely: 1) being active in one's approach to learning and practice; 2) understanding the language as a system, 3) using the language in real communication, 4) monitoring one's interlanguage; and 5) accepting the affective demands of language learning. All these characteristics are still deemed to be essential GLL traits today. In sum, as Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) noted, results from prior GLL studies indicated it takes more than a high degree language aptitude and motivation for a learner to excel - the learner's active application of their individualized learning techniques in the learning process also plays a crucial role.

With the change of time, in addition to continuing investigating the roles of attitudes, motivation and learning strategies in good language learning (see a collection of studies in Griffiths, 2008), researchers have also started to consider sociocultural factors in more recent research (Finkbeiner, 2008; Gan, Humphreys, &

Hamp-Lyons, 2004; Huang, 2012; Norton & Toohey, 2001). Finkbeiner (2008) argued that in order to competently navigate between different cultural and linguistic worlds, it is paramount GLLs possess cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness, empathy, and an ability to change perspectives. Norton and Toohey's (2001) research provided examples of how GLLs negotiated their social and cultural contexts. The study examined the processes through which two Polish immigrants developed into GLLs in Canada. The key to the two learners' success were found to lie in their ability to access the social networks of the Canadian local communities of English language speakers by utilizing their human agency. That is, both learners were able to offer the Canadian communities what they needed, and in the process of doing so, the learners created "counterdiscourses in which their identities could be respected" (Norton & Toohey, 2001, p.318), thereby enhancing the possibilities for shared conversation with the communities. While not disregarding the roles of learning strategies in these two learners' success, Norton and Toohey called for a more complex view of a GLL. They considered GLLs' proficiencies were not merely determined by what they did individually but also by how they were able to capitalize on the opportunities afforded by their communities.

2.2 Good Language Learners in Asian EFL Contexts

GLL research has been largely dominated by a Euro-Anglo English-as-a-second-language (ESL) perspective. Most studies were conducted in Western countries, with participants being either ESL/EFL learners of mixed nationalities, or native speakers of English learning a foreign language (Gan, et al., 2004). Thus far, the notion of a GLL in Asian EFL contexts has not yet received due attention. In particular, an assiduous search of the literature failed to locate studies that investigated GLLs in the Taiwanese context. Previous studies exploring this topic in Asian EFL contexts have tended to underscore memorization and constant practice as the keys to the learners' achievements (Ding, 2007; Takeuchi, 2003). Ding's (2007) study of three English speech winners in China, for example, found text memorization and imitation allowed the learners to attend to forms, which,

according to Ding, facilitated effective noticing and rehearsing, resulting in their success. Takeuchi (2003) analyzed self-reported learning behaviors of 160 GLLs in Japan, most of whom were learning English. The study also identified several learning strategies considered by Takeuchi to be unique to Asian EFL learners, including: effort to maximize input, conscious learning, use of memory strategies to internalize the linguistic system, and constant practice. Takeuchi argued that the GLLs developed these strategies as a result of lacking opportunities to use the target language in an authentic environment.

Gan, et al.'s (2004) study confirmed the importance of memorization and constant practice for Chinese EFL learners, while also highlighting good learners' use of metacognitive strategies. Through interviews and learner diaries, the study compared the attitudes, strategies and motivation of 9 successful and 9 unsuccessful EFL university learners in China. The GLLs were found to hold positive attitudes towards the rigid classroom practice. They set their own goals and took measures to overcome their learning problems, as well as being both externally and internally motivated. By contrast, the poor learners were disillusioned by the classroom practice; attributed their learning problems to factors outside themselves; and were only motivated by exams. Despite these distinct differences, both groups of learners were found to learn words by rote and undertake similar language practice activities (such as previewing lessons). The finding that memorization and constant practice were also adopted by the poor learners suggested these two factors may not be the keys to Chinese GLLs' achievements.

2.3 Taiwanese Learners' Beliefs about English Learning

To contextualize the present study, this section reviews studies of Taiwanese learners' beliefs about English learning. One trend emerging from this line of research is the identification of a mismatch between Taiwanese EFL learners' beliefs and their learning experiences (Chung, 2013; Chung & Huang, 2009; Savignon, & Wang, 2003). One study (Savignon & Wang, 2003) surveyed 174 university freshmen about their attitudes towards English learning and their perceptions of the

instructional practices they had experienced in secondary schools. The participants expressed a strong preference for a meaning-based approach, both in their attitudes towards English learning and in their expectations of classroom practices, which formed a marked contrast to their negative attitudes towards the form-based teaching practices they had experienced.

Another trend in this research is, like in Asian GLL research, there is a growing emphasis on understanding the learners within their unique and complex social structures. This emphasis is most noticeable in studies of Taiwanese learners' learning motivation. Several researchers (Chen, Warden & Chang, 2005; Huang, 2012; Warden & Lin, 2000) have cautioned against applying the Western notion of integrative and instrumental motivation to EFL students in Chinese cultural contexts, and motivators specifically for these students' learning were proposed. Warden and Lin's (2000) survey of 500 Taiwanese university students, for example, found the students had strong instrumental motivation and "required" motivation (a drive to learn English because it is mandatory), but the study was not able to identify integrative motivation in the students. Chen et al. (2005) further added a motivator, the "Chinese Imperative," to describe Chinese learners' drive to learn. It was based on the premise that attaining academic success in the Chinese culture does not simply, as commonly believed, help a learner fulfill social expectations or bring honor to their family, but it also earns a Chinese learner others' respect for their *personal* capabilities. In this sense, Chen et al. asserted, the motivator embodies the pursuit of self-realization in Western, individualist cultures. In short, sociocultural factors have added to the complexity of Taiwanese EFL learners' beliefs about successful English learning.

Finally, previous studies have also shown Taiwanese learners tended not to equate good exam results with good English language abilities (Chung, 2013; Chung & Huang, 2009). This further highlights the importance of understanding how Taiwanese students define a successful EFL learner. Considering EFL education in Taiwanese secondary schools is heavily constrained by exam pressure, the present study focused on exploring the views of university freshmen, whose learning beliefs

are less likely to be dictated by the need to pass exams. The investigation aimed to answer two questions:

(1) How do Taiwanese university freshmen define a successful EFL learner?

(2) What deficiencies do the students feel about their own learning that keep them from being a successful learner as they define it?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

A questionnaire and focus group interviews were used to collect data. As the study was exploratory in nature, it employed a convenience sample. The study was conducted in the researcher's 3 freshman English classes at a national university in Taiwan, and the participants were 109 students (male, $n = 39$; female, $n = 70$) who completed the questionnaire. Their degree programs were: communication ($n = 17$), foreign languages ($n = 19$), commerce ($n = 36$), law ($n = 29$), and education ($n = 8$). They were aged between 18 and 19, with approximately 9 years of English language education. Fourteen of the students (male, $n = 6$; female, $n = 8$) participated in the focus groups, and their degree programs were: communication ($n = 2$), foreign languages ($n = 1$), commerce ($n = 7$), law ($n = 4$).

3.2 Procedures

The researcher administered both the questionnaire and focus group interviews in Chinese to allow the participants to effectively express their views in their mother tongue. The questionnaire was administered to the 3 classes at the beginning of the first semester. This point in time was chosen to prevent the participants' views from being affected by the researcher's teaching. The questionnaire contained only one question, "What kind of students tend to learn English better than others?" which aimed to elicit the respondent's definition of a successful EFL learner in an open-ended manner. The respondent was asked to provide 3 characteristics of such students. After the data collected was analyzed, an invitation to attend focus group interviews was sent to all respondents. The purpose for conducting these interviews

was to allow the students to elaborate on their own answers in the questionnaire, as well as to comment on the results of the questionnaire. Fourteen students accepted the invitation and they were divided into 4 groups. Groups 1 and 4 comprised 3 students, and groups 2 and 3 comprised 4 students. Each group discussion lasted for about 50 minutes. Each discussion commenced with every participant responding to the question, "Could you describe a fellow English learner whose English abilities you consider to be the best?" Following this, the participants were asked what they considered to be the problems in their own learning that impeded them from being a successful learner as they described it. Finally, a list of themes emerging from the questionnaire data (see "characteristic" in Table 1) was presented to the participants for them to discuss. The focus group data was transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed all the data using an inductive approach to coding. In the questionnaire, of each of the three characteristics of a good EFL learner provided by each respondent, most could be coded as a single characteristic; some however straddled two categories. Thus, in total, the analysis of the questionnaire data yielded 345 units of coding. Through open coding, categories and sub-categories of themes were established. The occurrences of each category were tallied to show the degree of the respondents' emphasis on the category. These categories (see "characteristic" in Table 1) formed a provisional coding frame for analyzing the focus group data, but the analysis remained primarily data-driven. During the process of reading and rereading the data, additional codes and categories were added to account for new issues until overarching themes emerged.

4. Results

This section presents the results in two parts. The first part discusses the results from the questionnaire data, and the second part reports on the focus group data.

4.1 Questionnaire results

Table 1 presents the questionnaire results. As can be seen, the respondents

identified 9 characteristics of a good EFL learner, and there is a clear difference in the respondents' perceived importance between the top 5 characteristics and the remaining 4. Among the top 5 characteristics, "effort" tops the list, accounting for more than one quarter (26.96%) of the total units of coding. It is followed by "courage to speak" (18.55%), "attitudes towards working hard" (15.36%) and then "environment" (15.07%), and "interest (15.07%). Except for environment, these characteristics were all factors of the affective domain, related to the learner' attitude, self-efficacy, anxiety and motivation. Each of the remaining 4 characteristics ("needs", "aptitude," "metacognition," "cognition") accounted for less than 4% of the total coding units. That the respondents attached little importance to aptitude, metacognition and cognition deserves attention, as these three factors have also been found to be significant in the GLL literature.

Table 1 Characteristics of a Good EFL Learner Provided by Questionnaire Respondents

Characteristic	Percentage (%)	Number
1. Effort	*26.96%*	*93*
Watch/Listen to more English programs, movies	7.83%	27
Read more	7.25%	25
Memorize more	6.96%	24
Speak more	4.35%	15
Write more	0.58%	2
2. Courage to speak	*18.55%*	*64*
Have the courage to speak	13.33%	46
Not afraid of making mistakes (when speaking)	3.19%	11
Confident/Not shy (to speak)	2.03%	7
3. Attitudes towards working hard	*15.36%*	*53*
Willing to spend time	12.75%	44
Take the initiative to learn	2.61%	9
4. Environment	*15.07%*	*52*
Lived overseas	4.93%	17
Family valuing English language education	4.06%	14
Have English-speaking environment	4.06%	14

Characteristic	Percentage (%)	Number
Have English-speaking friends	2.03%	7
5. Interest	*15.07%*	*52*
Interest in learning English	9.28%	32
Interest in English culture	5.80%	20
6. Need	*3.77%*	*13*
Future plans involving the use of English	3.19%	11
Need to use English in day-to-day life	0.58%	2
7. Aptitude	*2.90%*	*10*
Have a talent for learning languages	2.03%	7
Have a sense of the language	0.87%	3
8. Metacognition	*1.45%*	*5*
Set clear goals	0.58%	2
Good at using resources	0.29%	1
Know one's learning problems	0.29%	1
Manage time well	0.29%	1
9. Cognition	*0.87%*	*3*
Understand sentence structures	0.29%	1
Understand how a word is used	0.29%	1
Repeating and being corrected	0.29%	1

4.2 Focus group interviews results

While the questionnaire results revealed the characteristics considered by the participants to be essential for being a GLL, the focus group interviews led to findings concerning the students' views of their own deficiencies as learners. The themes emerging from the discussions fall into three categories: memorization, courage to speak and environment.

4.2.1 Memorization

Among the 24 references to memorization in the questionnaire, 20 (83%) specified memorizing more words, 1 specified memorizing good phrases and sentences, and the remaining 3 did not mention what to memorize. The emphasis on

memorizing more words was unexpected since the university entrance exam required students to memorize at least 7,000 words, so presumably increasing their vocabulary was not a pressing matter for these students. Therefore, the focus group participants were invited to elaborate on why memorizing more words was an important GLL characteristic. The students explained it was not that they thought GLLs memorized more words than others, but that while the GLLs they had met did not seem to have difficulty remembering and using the words they had learned, they did. In the following remark, student M in group 4 (hereafter, G4M) described why he could not remember the words he had learned with a metaphor:

> We were required to memorize thousands of words, but the words stayed stagnant in my head, and eventually became rotten. I rarely used them, so I forgot them. As it turns out, my vocabulary is still small, so remembering words is a big challenge for me.

In all groups, the students reported experiences of not being able to express themselves because of a lack of vocabulary, sometimes even very basic vocabulary. One shared a frustrating experience of trying to give directions to a foreigner in English, which was typical among the participants:

> A friend and I sat in front of a building, and two foreigners asked us how to get to another building. My brains immediately froze. I remembered thinking, "How do I put this, 'that way?' 'pass that … that what?' What do I call that in English?" And all I ended up saying was, "white building, white building." It was humiliating. (G4N)

Others (G1A, G2F, G3I, G3K) also said they believed most students, like themselves, considered memorizing words to be important because vocabulary was a significant part on the English tests throughout their high school years. In short, the students' ostensible emphasis on memorization in fact reflects their lack of opportunities at school to practice using the language for authentic communicative purposes, which is closely linked to the next theme, that of courage to speak.

4.2.2 Courage to Speak

The students unanimously stated having courage to speak was an indispensable trait of a GLL, and all but one student said this was the characteristic they themselves lacked and desired most. In the following statement, a student argued Taiwanese learners' fear of speaking stemmed from the way they were taught at school:

> We were taught to give the correct answers to questions we were asked, so naturally, we became accustomed to thinking carefully about whether what we were about to say was correct or not before saying it. This concern is ever-present. I worry about people's reactions to what I say. If I say something wrong, would they think badly of me? (G2G)

Almost all the students shared this anxiety about speaking English. Several of them (G1A, G3H, G3J, G4L) reiterated student G2G's opinion, relating the worry about people's reactions to that of losing face. Student G1A noted,

> Even if people don't laugh at me when I make mistakes, I can still tell by their facial expressions that they don't understand me, and this feeling alone is bad enough for me to regret opening my mouth.

Another reason mentioned by the students (e.g., G3I, G3K, G4M, G4N) to cause their speaking anxiety was making mistakes when speaking reminded them of getting an answer wrong on a written test. They said this was something they strived to avoid throughout their education. Student G3K explained speaking was nerve-racking because there was no time to prepare for it: "I can check whether what I write is fine before handing in my paper, but I can't take back something I've said. I'm not used to speaking without preparation."

4.2.3 Environment

While all students agreed the 5 leading characteristics in the questionnaire results (effort, courage to speak, attitudes towards working hard, environment and interest) were significant in the making of a GLL, their descriptions of a peer GLL

they had met underscored the factor of environment. Of the 14 GLLs discussed by the participants, 7 had an experience of staying in an English-speaking country for a period of time, and 1 had studied at an international school in China. Most of the rest of the GLLs were described as growing up in a family where the parents highly valued their English language education. For example, one said his GLL classmate's parents "had him watch English cartoons when he was little, and he was already watching CNN in junior high" (G3H); another mentioned his GLL friend "went to the type of language schools where he spoke to foreign teachers all the time" (G4N).

It became clear from the discussions that the students felt the unique environment their GLL classmates had been exposed to did not only contribute to their fluency, good listening abilities, and an ability to communicate with English speakers, but more importantly, it provided them with sociolinguistic and cultural knowledge that most students had no access to. For example, one said he was impressed by the type of vocabulary his GLL friend used, "He knew a lot of English slang and spoken English, even rude words. He sounded like an American" (G3J). Another student focused on her GLL classmate's knowledge of the English culture,

> When the American students from our sister school visited our school, I found she was able to understand not only what they said but also their jokes. She discussed things like movies and novels with them. She talked to them about things other than our culture. It seemed easy for her to mingle with them. (G1B)

Student G1B then added even though she herself also tried to watch English movies and read novels to improve her English, what she watched and read did not happen to be what the American students liked, so she could not interact with them as well as her GLL classmate.

A recurring phrase the participants used to distinguish their peer GLLs from average learners was the GLLs used English "in a very natural manner." Student G4M offered an example in relation to reading:

I saw him reading a novel in his iPad once, and I was amazed at how fast he could read it. I tried to read novels to improve my English too. I knew I didn't need to read word for word, line by line when reading a novel, but I couldn't read in the way he did. It looked very natural for him; it was like us reading a Chinese novel.

In terms of writing, student G2E mentioned her GLL classmate's writing "told a story, which read differently than most Taiwanese students' writing" although student G2E was unable to explain the exact differences. A student in another group offered a useful explanation for this in her comparison of her own writing with that of her GLL friend,

Her writing didn't contain difficult words - at most only one or two words I didn't know - but she used her words in a natural way. Those words, when you think about it, were very simple, and I knew them too, but she was just able to use them as a native speaker would do. (G4L)

5. Discussion

This study aimed to understand Taiwanese university freshmen's views on what it takes to effectively learn a language and their own perceived inadequacies as learners. It yielded two important findings. First, the questionnaire results indicated the students considered affect-related factors to be more important for successful learning than other factors such as aptitude and learning strategies. Second, the focus group data revealed that the students perceived a lack of sociolinguistic knowledge and anxiety when speaking as their major deficiencies as learners.

The students' emphases on the various types of effort a GLL makes and a GLL's positive attitudes towards making the effort in the questionnaire showed their belief that success in learning English is attainable. According to attribution theory, one often attributes their success or failure to perform a task to four causes: ability, task difficulty, effort, or luck. Graham (1997) further argued learners who attribute their level of success to the first two of these causes - ability and task difficulty - tend

to be less motivated as they deem these factors to be unalterable, hence beyond their control, so any action taken to overcome them is futile. By contrast, learners who attribute their level of success to effort view effort as a factor they can control, and consequently have greater motivation. Clearly, the students in the present study believed they could potentially become a GLL, which would likely render them motivated learners. This is undoubtedly an optimistic finding for EFL instructors of Taiwanese learners.

On the other hand, the small numbers of references to cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies in the questionnaire suggested the students either did not consider these strategies important or were not aware of the benefits of these strategies for their language learning. This study argues for the latter. Despite the recent government-initiated educational reforms, Taiwanese EFL instruction in secondary schools remains largely teacher-centered and test-oriented (Chen & Hsieh, 2011). To help students cope with exams, the spoon-feeding teaching method continues to prevail, in which the teacher breaks the target language into discrete parts and teaches them to students. To excel in such an educational context, cognitive and metacognitive skills are often not necessary. The participants' little experience in applying these skills to their learning, this study contends, resulted in their unawareness of the importance of the skills.

To illustrate this point further, most Taiwanese high school students share the experience of memorizing thousands of words from an organized vocabulary list provided by their teachers. To learn the words, as the focus group participants in this study explained, students try to memorize them as many times as they can. It should be stressed here that memorization was not discussed by the students in this study as a cognitive strategy as in Ding's (2007) and Takeuchi's (2003) studies; rather, it was mentioned as a type of effort one should make to increase their vocabulary. Put another way, the participants did not comment on how they tried to remember a word or how memorization enabled them to learn the language more effectively; instead, they simply expressed the belief that the greater effort one makes to

memorize a word, the more likely one would be able to retrieve it from their memory when needed.

Moreover, since most Taiwanese teachers also plan and monitor students' learning by scheduling tests for them, there is little need to teach learners metacognitive strategies. The students' unawareness of this type of learning strategies indeed serves as a warning to EFL instructors in Taiwan about students' incapacity to take the initiative to continue learning and be responsible for their learning when they finish their formal education. As O'Malley and Chamot (1990) cautioned, "students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction or opportunity to plan their learning, monitor their progress, or review their accomplishments and future learning directions" (p.8).

Turning to the students' own perceived inadequacies as learners with regard to speaking anxiety, this study provided evidence supporting Liu and Jackson's (2008) finding that Chinese learners' apprehension about speaking English was positively correlated to their fear of being negatively evaluated and anxiety about tests. The students in the present study equated speaking with taking a test, and felt "anything less than a perfect test performance [was] a failure," to use Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's (1986, p.128) description of a test-anxious student. As also shown in this study, Taiwanese learners' speaking anxiety is further exacerbated by the culturally-induced fear of losing face, through public displays of incompetence when making errors.

Although speaking anxiety and the resultant reticence can be induced by various reasons, such as personality, communicative competence and social situation (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément & Noels, 1998), research (Bao, 2014; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Tsui, 1996) has identified teacher responsibility as one of the factors. For example, teacher support and task orientation were found to directly influence Chinese learners' communication confidence and willingness to speak (Peng and Woodrow, 2010). Specifically, teachers' little tolerance of silence or errors, uneven distribution of talk-turns, and incomprehensive input were located as sources of learner anxiety (Bao, 2014; Tsui, 1996). In this study, the students'

remark on needing sufficient time to prepare before responding to a relatively simple real-life situation such as giving directions suggested the ways they were taught at school did not enable them to speak English in an unrehearsed manner. As was also revealed in the focus group interviews, the most common form of verbal communication in the students' learning experiences was making oral presentations in front of the class, and the students were used to being given time to prepare for their speeches. As a result of lacking experience in speaking English instantaneously, the students felt incapable of dealing with the situation when an immediate response was required of them. It is therefore advised that EFL pedagogy in Taiwan help alleviate learners' speaking anxiety by providing ample opportunities for learners to practice speaking in an unrehearsed manner in a non-threatening environment (such as through pair or group work), where learners can learn to feel comfortable with making mistakes.

Finally, the focus group participants' emphasis on their peer GLLs' ability (and the participants' own inability) to use English appropriately ("in a natural manner") led to the most important finding of this study: despite their willingness to put in hard work, the students felt unable to gain sociolinguistic and cultural knowledge at school. As they repeatedly stated, their peer GLLs possessed the type of knowledge that average Taiwanese learners did not have, such as knowledge of English slang and of the culture of English speakers of their age. This strongly indicated the participants felt their not knowing the sociocultural rules of the English culture was a major impediment to their becoming a GLL.

Bachman and Palmer's (1996) model of communicative language use posits that language knowledge is divided into four types: grammatical knowledge, textual knowledge, functional knowledge, and sociolinguistic knowledge. While grammatical knowledge and textual knowledge can apparently be attained through effort, thus being within the control of learners, the acquisition of functional knowledge (such as intended meaning) and sociolinguistic knowledge (such as slang and levels of formality) often entails learners engaging in scenarios where variants of these types of input are available. For the majority of EFL learners who do not have

opportunities to expose themselves to the various scenarios, it is crucial these forms of knowledge be included in instruction. This is particularly important for Asian EFL learners due to the great differences between the cultural norms of Chinese and English, as in this situation, learners are unable to "pick up" these rules, hence likely encountering cross-cultural miscommunication (Yu, 2008). As shown in this study, the fear of such miscommunication added to the participants' anxiety and reluctance to speak. Unfortunately, as Yu (2008) noted, although the importance of helping learners foster sociolinguistic competence is widely recognized by Taiwanese EFL professionals, the teaching of sociolinguistic rules at schools remains most neglected.

One obvious effect of globalization is learners now have a growing need to relate to people their age in other countries. This need appeared to cause the students in this study to add possessing sociolinguistic knowledge to their list of GLL characteristics. The finding accentuates the urgency of providing sociolinguistic instruction in Asian EFL classroom practice to equip learners with the ability to mix with people globally.

6. Conclusion and Implications

This study pieced together a profile of a successful EFL learner from Taiwanese university freshmen's perspective. A successful learner was defined by the participants as one who is hard-working and confident in speaking, and has sociolinguistic and cultural knowledge. Given the participants' prior language learning experiences, in which they appeared to have little experience in exercising cognitive and metacognitive strategies, these learning strategies are consequently missing from the profile they delineated. The findings of this study have several important implications. On a theoretical level, the study highlighted the importance of context sensitivity in constructing theories about a good language learner. In terms of practice, the study has three implications for Asian EFL teaching: first and foremost, sociolinguistic and cultural knowledge should be explicitly taught to learners; second, learners should be provided with sufficient opportunities to

experience using cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies; third, a greater emphasis should be placed on helping learners allay their anxiety about speaking.

On a final note, it should be underscored that the definition of a successful EFL learner generated in this study is not meant to be taken as the definition of a successful learner *per se*. Nor did the study claim the participants involved were a representative sample of Taiwanese university freshmen. Rather, the purpose of the study was to bring learners' own beliefs about a successful learner to the foreground, as these beliefs can provide an alternative way for EFL instructors to understand their learners and, in turn, examine their practices. With access to these beliefs, EFL instructors will be able to choose to reinforce or to challenge them, as well as to assist learners to cultivate additional beliefs conducive to successful language learning. Future research on a larger sample involving learners across different types of universities will be helpful.

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