

A STUDY IN CHINA ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' VIEWS ON LEARNING ENGLISH AS
A FOREIGN LANGUAGE.

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ABSTRACT

The Chinese secondary school system is an ideal instance of how the English language's globalisation has impacted teaching and learning. The country's considerable student population, standardised academic culture and focus on international competition may deliver the exemplary context for gaining insight into students' perspectives on English as a foreign language (ELF) education. The elements that affect Chinese secondary school students' views and behaviours towards learning English include their teachers' competence, test pressure, peer influence, reasons to learn and resources available to them. This research employed a quantitative technique and stratified sampling to ensure equal representation across regions, school types and grade levels. A total of 654 valid answers were gathered from students. ANOVA were used to assess the data and find significant associations. The results indicate that the effectiveness of English language acquisition is significantly impacted by the competence of teachers. Learners of English showed more enthusiasm, faith and flexibility when instructed by teachers who were both highly competent in the language and familiar with their pedagogical practices. On the other side, teachers who recognise excessive emphasis on tests, employ too much memorisation and fail to offer students enough opportunities to practice communicating effectively were seen as barriers that lowered motivation and made it difficult to use language in contexts other than tests. Differences in funding across schools in urban and rural areas and a lack of budget for teacher education were other challenges. The objective of the project is to enhance English teaching in a way that can be sustained and ensure that secondary school students succeed in college, in their careers and in global communication by addressing these problems.

Keywords: English as a foreign language (EFL), secondary education, teachers' competence, China, students' perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

With an official status in 67 nations, English is a universal language spoken by over 1.35 billion people. The English language is vital to the global economy, scientific community, economic community, educational system and tourist industry. Students find it challenging to acquire English despite its usage as a medium of instruction due to the language's complexity. Learning new words and grammar as well as issues with motivation are all aspects of English learning

(Moraru, 2020). The secondary school system in China plays a crucial role in the country's talent development efforts. The English education system as a whole depends on senior high school English classes as a vital connection between compulsory and postsecondary education. There are nearly 40 million students enrolled in China's senior high schools and English is a mandated subject in the majority of these institutions. Examining the ideas and techniques of English language learners in high school is crucial because of the huge number of such students and the significance that comes with performing well in high school English classes (Yu et al., 2023). Students of the English language sometimes struggle with acquiring an awareness of the language's grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Listening, reading and creating content in English are additional areas where students stumble. Some students struggle to learn a language because their professors instruct them in English when they are really speaking Chinese. Utilising Chinese for clarifying English also presents a challenge. 'Translanguaging' or 'code-switching' is a strategy used by certain English language teachers to ensure that their students fully grasp concepts presented in class. To describe and clarify foreign words and phrases, translanguaging makes use of the first language (Lonka et al., 2021). While debates over English and languages other than English (LOTE) tend to centre on the former and the latter's relative decrease in a worldwide setting, the situation is reversed in China. Recently executed legislative changes have prompted many to wonder whether English language instruction is entering its "winter" phase. But both elementary and secondary schools in China are required to teach English. In China, teaching foreign languages seems to be a complicated and varied issue (Liang & Ye, 2021).

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The demand to learn English increased in China as the country's economy expanded and more businesses recognised the value of using it as a worldwide language for communication. Teaching EFL became compulsory in China's primary schools in 2001. The English language has been further improved by the rapid expansion of private language schools across the nation. Although many nations speak English, learning it may be difficult. Authentic, practical English classes are often lacking in both teachers' and students' cultural understanding of the language and its nuances. Students spend six years or more studying English in middle and high school but they fail to utilise it in conversation because they are so focused on exams. Grammar is learnt and memorised but the language does not get utilised in conversation (Fan & Li, 2021). Nevertheless, some Chinese officials are still struggling with the idea that the English language has a hegemonic impact on Chinese ideology and culture due to its economic favourability (Shang, 2020). Another challenge in learning English is the language's distinctive spelling and grammar. Despite their various pronunciations, the terms remain intact in spelling. Furthermore, Chinese students struggle to differentiate between English and Chinese due to the two languages' different grammatical patterns. Since the first language gets in the way of learning the second, students have trouble expressing themselves in English (McLeod-Chambless, 2021). Students whose native tongue is not English would have more resources at their disposal to improve their communication skills. Aside from personal effort, several factors

impact the second dimension which is a preference to communicate. Concerns about a change for the worse in students' views were the catalyst for initiating this research. Frontline language teachers have a deep awareness of how important students' views towards a foreign language are to the learning process.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This research aims to investigate the perspectives and conduct of Chinese secondary school students with regard to their efforts to acquire English language proficiency. This study seeks to shed light on the immediate challenges encountered by organisations and students in the highly competitive and demanding field of secondary education. These barriers include factors like exam pressure, learning motivation, teaching methods, resource accessibility and cultural attitudes. The research investigated students' language learning practices, teacher competency, peer influence and levels of self-confidence regarding their use of English to discover connections among these factors. To make language acquisition more prosperous, delightful, and applicable to students' future requirements, the research also looked into the unstructured parts of English learning. This study will better prepare secondary school students for opportunities in further education and worldwide communication. The significance of this work is underscored by many factors. First, the study shows that the socioeconomic status of rural Chinese students significantly affects their English learning skills and the amount of cultural and other capital they may associate with English. Since they typically encounter challenging circumstances that prevent them from advancing to higher education, students from remote regions must put forth a greater effort than those in urban areas throughout the course of their education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been an increasing trend in the focus on mindset among first and foreign language researchers. Most research on the topic agrees that the student's perspective is crucial to effective pedagogies when learning a second or foreign language. For several reasons, it is essential to conduct research on students' viewpoints on language teaching (Shang, 2020). "English fever" is a commonly used term to explain the overall adoption of English as an additional language in nations where the language is not the official language. Another indicator of the "English fever" is the prevalence of foreign languages among secondary school students. A rule for the Gaokao (National College Entrance Examination) and the 'double reduction,' two new regulations implemented by China in 2021 had profound impacts on the study of languages besides English and English classes respectively. Moreover, English is the most popular foreign language subject even though there are more and more schools offering various languages. Only 0.47 per cent of 2019 Gaokao takers chose one of the other five languages in China while 99.53 per cent selected English (Ah, 2023). On the other hand, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission decided to cancel the final English assessments for primary school pupils because of the "double reduction" schemes. The objective of this adjustment was to help students

become less anxious about tests. After that, Beijing made it illegal for primary and middle schools to employ foreign teaching materials and rigorously limited their usage in high schools. The books must be based on the national curriculum and the authorities must check and approve them (Lin, 2022). Even though English language education in China has advanced a long way and many Chinese people's English competence has increased dramatically over the last few decades, this industry continues to deal with some obstacles. Despite utilising a more interactive approach, the foreign teachers lack the required exam-passing skills suggesting that a cultural misunderstanding of Chinese students' comprehension and knowledge retention makes the foundational training in English as a second or foreign language training ineffective. Moreover, the lack of consistency in the curriculum is a result of the numerous separate Chinese English assessment systems. The English Majors exam and the English promotion exam constitute two of China's most important English assessment systems. Unfortunately, there is no criterion by which the test-takers may be evaluated on a nationwide level (Lan et al., 2021).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is the impact of teachers' competence on learning English as a foreign language?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

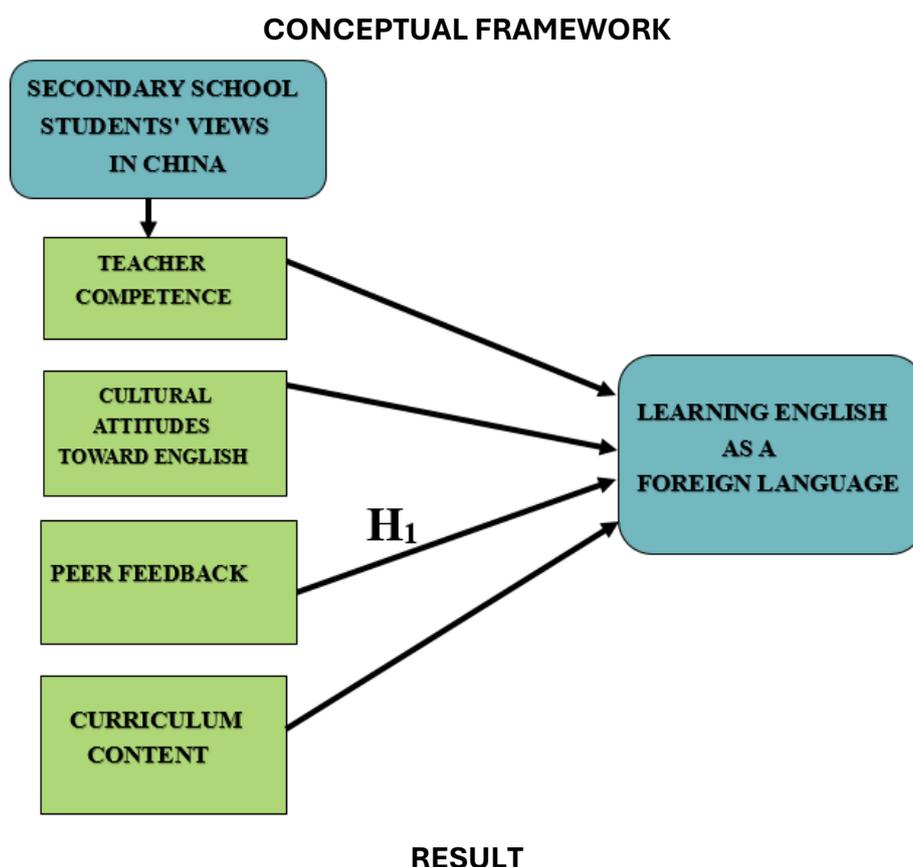
Research Design: This study employed a quantitative research strategy to determine how secondary school students responded about learning EFL. The researcher used SPSS version 25 to examine the data. Descriptive statistics were used by the researcher to include demographic and project-related data. Researchers employed inferential statistics including probability ratios with 95% confidence intervals to figure out what the correlations were and how extensive they were. A p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. A combination of component analysis and analysis of variance allowed the researcher to confirm the data and isolate statistically different groups.

Sampling: Data for the study were collected by the researcher using stratified sampling. Sample size projections provided by Raosoft indicate that 623 individuals will be required to conduct the research. The researcher randomly assigned 750 questionnaires to various strata in an effort to decrease the response rate. Following that, the researcher received 702 completed surveys. The overall number of genuine responses was 654, with 48 respondents providing partial or inaccurate answers.

Data and Measurement: Scheduled questionnaire surveys were the primary tool for gathering information. In the first part, the researcher enquired about the respondents' demographics and occupations. In the second section, the researcher offered a five-point Likert scale to assess their opinions on several project management matters. Stratified sampling ensured inclusion of all types of projects and functions. Much of the study's secondary data came from scholarly journals, organisational documents and online databases.

Statistical Software: For statistical analysis, the researcher relied on SPSS 25 and Microsoft Excel.

Statistical Tools: The use of descriptive analysis has provided insight into a variety of strata-specific demographic and project-related variables. Inductive statistical methods include things like 95% confidence intervals for odds ratios, ANOVA for group comparisons and factor analysis for measurement reliability and theoretical validation.



Factor Analysis: Factor Analysis (FA) seeks to identify hidden elements within easily accessible data. Regression findings are often used for evaluations in situations when simple visual or psychological symptoms are unavailable. The whole point of simulation is to identify possible weak points, breaches, and visible connections. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test is used to assess data collected from multiple regression investigations. The mathematical model and its sample variables are reliable estimators. The data may reveal the existence of duplicates. Reducing the proportions makes the information more visible. To help the investigator, KMO assigns them a number between 0 and 1. If the KMO is between 0.8 and 1, then the sample population is large enough. Kaiser has set the following criteria for certification: Absurd, ranging from 0.050 to 0.059, far lower than the typical range of 0.60 to 0.69. The typical range for middle grade is 0.70 to 0.79. An evaluation on the quality scale that falls between 0.80 and 0.89. They are astonished by the range of 0.90 to 1.00.

Sampling Adequacy Measured by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin 0.905.

The results of Bartlett's test of Sphericity are as follows:

Approx. chi-square = 3252.968

df = 190

sig = .000

Table 1. Testing for KMO and Bartlett's Test.

| KMO and Bartlett's Test | | |
|---|---------------------------|----------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. | | .905 |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity | Approx. Chi-Square | 3252.968 |
| | df | 190 |
| | Sig. | .000 |

In fundamental terms, this permits claims that relate to sampling. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was used to evaluate the correlation matrices' significance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic indicates that the sample size is sufficient at 0.905. A p-value of 0.00 is observed when conducting Bartlett's Sphericity test. Given that Bartlett's Sphericity test yielded a positive result, it is viable to conclude that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

Secondary School Students' Views in China: In China, the word "high school" or "secondary education" refers to the entire third level of secondary schooling. Students in China who are engaged in vocational education are not included in this phase. Most of the time, it includes students who are 15 to 18 years old who are in grades 10 to 12. China recently launched an attempt to broaden its high school enrolment. In 2020, 56% of Chinese high schools had net enrolment. The number of high school students divided by the overall population of 15–17-year-olds produces this rate (Ministry of Education, 2023). Numerous significant changes have taken place in secondary English education in China during the last three decades bringing it in line with what seems to be a growing global trend in ideas and practices related to language learning. Each aspect of English language instruction has evolved to reflect lesson plans, student skills and motivation, textbooks and assessments. A common issue in most learning environments is a lack of motivation to communicate in a different language particularly while learning a foreign language. Learners either fail to desire it or believe that it matters enough to communicate. Students often hold back from speaking up in class because they are concerned about how their peers will perceive them and if their ideas will be well-received. This fear of rejection motivates

many students to keep quiet. Students' reading rates specify the first dimension which is the growth of stronger language skills over time (Jamalifar & Salehi, 2020).

FACTOR

Teachers' Competence: To completely comprehend the current view and competence of Chinese English teachers, it is essential to explore their historical background. China's education has been greatly affected by the fierce social and political developments of the 20th century, including civil wars within the country, the brutal events of the Second World War and the Cultural Revolution. These transformations harmed the accessibility and quality of English education in China and have continued into the modern era (Hanyi et al., 2021). Even after years of schooling, many prospective English teachers continue to be held back by these factors and their static pedagogical practices and poor levels of competency. Chinese society has been moulded over decades by invisible forces, and the present generation of English teachers is a product of that mould. Traditional educational ideas in China probably influence how Chinese teachers approach teaching (Chen, 2022). Therefore, teacher training programs should be able to both improve teachers' competence and result in significant changes in teachers' perspectives in order to help them adapt to innovation. This will help teachers understand the changes in the NCS better. But not all Chinese teachers will be able to profit from them since most Chinese teacher education programs are quite restrictive and selective. Some teachers can find that shorter courses help them a lot. But if they fail to receive the necessary help, they can have trouble understanding the new concepts or go back to their old ways of teaching and ignore the new ones.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Learning English as a Foreign Language: Learning English for individuals whose first language is not English is known as EFL. This is especially true for those whose birthplaces do not recognise English as an official language. Developing a second language is both thrilling and a difficult endeavour. For instance, regardless of the student's original language, there are similar challenges that they face when learning English. While EFL is frequently associated with teaching the English language to students from nations where English is not the native language, it may also mean studying English for native English speakers. For children whose first language is not English, many US academic institutions provide EFL programmes. An essential part of each language is its grammar. Grammar rules for adjectives, nouns, adjectival phrases, verb tenses and many more are covered in detail in EFL classes. Correctly constructing words and phrases is another skill children acquire. To communicate effectively in a foreign language, one must master the grammar. An expanding component in China's economic and social development, English has appeared as the official language of international communication in the modern, globalised world. The English language has special importance for developing nations like China whose influence in global affairs is increasing. Excellent English proficiency

opens up more possibilities and encourages China's overall global competitiveness (Zhenyu, 2020).

Relationship between Teachers' Competence and Learning EFL: Teachers regard curriculum change as a complicated and ever-changing part of their profession. Reforms to the curriculum require that teachers of EFL continually improve their skills. However, to foster EFL instructors' new commitments, professional development must include both ongoing educational and professional growth opportunities. The National Curriculum Standard (NCS) mandated English classes in junior and senior high schools. This model would enable students to actively participate in their English language learning and increase their opportunities for expressive expression. Teachers of EFL demonstrate reserved enthusiasm for improving their students' English-learning experiences and enjoyment, but the importance of humanistic principles as a motivating factor for both students and teachers is not widely recognised (Fojkar et al., 2022). They usually favour student-centered classrooms, but they are not sure whether personalised education will be effective or if it is even possible to suit the needs of every student. This shows that their assumptions about how people learn languages and how well they understood the NCS influenced how they chose to teach. Students would probably study better if they had a more positive assessment of their learning environment as this view holds that the learning environment has an important effect on these views. Students' motivation to study English is influenced by their perception of the relevance of education in their daily lives. Therefore, teachers would be the first to observe any significant changes in student behaviour, engagement or motivation (Duan et al., 2022).

Competent teachers are experienced at teaching and have an excellent command of the language. They make lessons pleasant and simple to learn. Their capacity to deliver cultural context, provide helpful feedback and employ a range of methods of instruction raises students' spirits and drives them. The way a teacher communicates with and conducts the classroom has a direct effect on how students feel about and want to practise English.

Based on the preceding discussion, the researcher developed the following hypothesis to examine the impact of teachers' competence in learning EFL:

“ H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between teachers' competence and learning EFL.”

“ H_1 : There is a significant relationship between teachers' competence and learning EFL.”

Table 2. H1 ANOVA Test.

| ANOVA | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|------|
| Sum | | | | | |
| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Between Groups | 38295.236 | 177 | 2719.858 | 939.826 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 998.385 | 476 | 2.894 | | |
| Total | 39293.621 | 653 | | | |

Results from this study are considerable. At the .000 p-value, which is less than the .05 alpha level, the F-value is 939.826 suggesting statistical significance. This signifies that the “H₁: There is a significant relationship between teachers’ competence and learning EFL” is accepted, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the research highlight that the efficiency of learning the English language among Chinese secondary school students is greatly impacted by the competence of their teachers. The results demonstrate that students' enthusiasm and level of participation were better when their instructors have powerful linguistic abilities and used current teaching approaches. Skilled educators could encourage their students, break down difficult concepts into small segments and establish an atmosphere that favours authentic dialogue. The study also found a variety of barriers to enhancing educators' competence. Many respondents argued that students had fewer chances to practice speaking and listening in English because the teaching techniques focused on tests. Given this, a lot of students lost interest and became less proficient at utilising the language in situations other than testing. Some professors still employ the traditional method of teaching by giving lectures to their pupils. These methods did not provide enough opportunities to communicate and listening chances to become better.

CONCLUSION

The outcomes of the study emphasise the importance of teachers' competence in enhancing Chinese secondary school students' English language acquisition. When teachers are proficient in their native languages and apply efficient teaching techniques, students prefer to do better in class. Teachers who are really skilled in their areas of expertise may inspire their students, assist them in gaining self-assurance and create an environment where genuine dialogue flourishes. Additionally, the research determined obstacles that limit improvement. The progress of English learning has been hampered by exam-oriented designs, limited training opportunities and the dependence on traditional classroom approaches. Unless circumstances change, students will have hardships acquiring the practical abilities necessary for college and international communication. Examining these barriers aside, the researchers discovered that emphasising teachers' competence greatly improves English language instruction. It is important to revisit evaluation practices, enforce student-centred pedagogy,

and support ongoing professional development for teachers. Taking these steps may make classrooms more comfortable places for learning and can aid students in expanding their language abilities. This method may help Chinese secondary school students in the long run by training them for success in school and in the workforce.

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