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EXAMINING EXPERIENCES WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDIES IN TAIWAN AND IN THE UNITED STATES

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EXAMINING EXPERIENCES WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDIES IN
TAIWAN AND IN THE UNITED STATES

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition:
Applied Linguistics and Teaching English as a Second Language

by
Ying-Mei Chien
December 2017

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ABSTRACT

The importance of learning English to find success in today's global community has never been more vital. However, choosing the best method for teaching English language skills in the second language (L2) classroom is still open for debate.

This paper examines L2 strategies for teaching English in Taiwan. More important, it examines the notion that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) training in Taiwan could be made more successful by incorporating more effective EFL teaching strategies, including a communicative, or creativity based methodology for second language learning.

EFL teaching methodology in Taiwan has and continues to emphasize a teacher centered learning strategy for L2 instruction, one where students do not question the instructor's opinions or authority—a learning environment where students heavily rely on memorization, where creativity and critical thinking take a back seat in the classroom learning environment, in many ways a receptive style methodology.

This paper will attempt to identify and examine what factors determine why Taiwanese teachers continue to rely on the teacher centered approach to L2 training— emphasizing a receptive methodology to EFL instruction, as opposed to a more creative, or communicative approach emphasizing critical thinking and creativity.

Data from this study is derived from interviews of multiple Taiwanese university students currently studying in United States. Data is also drawn from the writings of leading researchers and scholars as amplified upon in the literature review section and related discussions.

This paper first examines some of the underlying concerns associated with Taiwanese L2 training programs and related EFL research. It also reviews the results of data analysis of student interviewee responses, which point to two main problem areas, or themes, which negatively impact Taiwan L2 training strategies: 1) an over emphasis on teacher centered instruction or a lecture only lesson 2) an over emphasis on student memorization as a learning technique, which may lead to an absence of critical thinking and creativity in the L2 learning environment. Discussions also examine how more effective elements of EFL teaching methodology may positively impact L2 training in Taiwan.

The findings of this paper will hopefully add a positive perspective regarding L2 training in Taiwan as well as improve study experiences for those Taiwan students seeking to further their educational opportunities in America.

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CHAPTER ONE

PROPOSAL

Conference Paper Proposal

The purpose of this paper is to examine how approaches to Taiwanese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) training may be improved and, in part, better prepare Taiwanese students for higher education experiences in the U.S. Taiwanese EFL training strategies are not as effective as they could be for several reasons— in the traditional Taiwanese classroom there is an over emphasis on a teacher centered training where students may become overly passive and indifferent to what is being taught. In such a traditional classroom, as Tseng's (1993) observation of junior high school English classrooms in Taiwan observes, the teacher "dominates the floor of speaking throughout the classroom session, and the students simply sit and listen" (p.136).

This paper will also examine how the Taiwan EFL training environment could better prepare Taiwanese students for higher education in the United States, which includes critical thinking, creative problem solving and student interaction as part of learning strategies. Liu (2001) mentions "Raising questions and offering comments in class helps students explore knowledge and develop critical thinking skills and enhances their intellectual development" (p.43). Compton- Lilly (2009) discusses these concerns, and the importance of addressing cultural diversity and sensitivity to students needs in the learning

environment. This must be addressed in order to improve the EFL instructional experience in the Taiwanese classroom, an experience in which the teacher must be more sensitive to students' learning styles.

Resulting data from student interview sessions which will be elaborated upon under the Analysis section of this paper will reinforce that EFL training in Taiwan heavily relies on a receptive approach to language training, while the U.S. approach featuring more communicative aspects of language training is the preferred teaching methodology among student interviewees who took part in my research.

Data was derived from interview questioning of students at a regional U.S. university, who had previously studied EFL in Taiwan, prior to beginning their education in the United States. Interviews were conducted in English. Ten student participants, ages 20 to 35, were selected who were engaged in both B.A. and or M.A. study track programs.

Interviews were audio recorded to support and supplement the written record of the interview questions. The data analysis method includes audio recordings of all student participant interview responses—the transcription of all oral data was then made ready for the analytical phase of my research project. Qualitative and statistical research enabled me to collect, analyze and present data in order to obtain stronger authenticity, reflecting participant responses and perspectives. In this regard, according to McMillan and

Schumacher (2006), interviews result in a much higher response rate than questionnaires.

Findings indicate that student interviewees prefer a learning methodology which emphasizes a creative, communicative learning strategy.

CHAPTER TWO

EXAMINING DIFFERENCES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: TAIWAN VERSUS UNITED STATES

Introduction

This paper examines how certain higher education methodologies and teaching strategies may benefit training in Taiwan, specifically as it concerns EFL, and how they may also benefit study experiences of Taiwan students who may seek to continue their higher education studies in America. EFL teaching methodology in Taiwan has and continues to emphasize a teacher centered learning environment, one where students do not question the teacher's authority, wisdom or opinions – a learning environment where students heavily rely on memorization skills, where the benefits of creativity and critical thinking are not integrated into the classroom learning process. As Tsou and Kao (2017) comment, “Most students in Asia are conditioned by the test-oriented secondary school system where rote learning seems to be an efficient way to earn good test scores” (p. 81).

This paper examines the learning experiences of students from Taiwan who are currently studying at the higher education level in the U.S. These Taiwanese students have experienced both the teacher oriented training style

of Taiwan and the U.S. approach to education which emphasizes more concern with individualized instruction, critical thinking and creativity. A key question raised is whether it is more beneficial for students to learn in a communicative style of learning as opposed to the strict, memory driven approach implemented in the Taiwanese classroom. Results of this paper's examination will help identify certain teaching methodologies which may prove helpful for enhancing EFL training in Taiwan— and thereby improve opportunities for success for Taiwanese students seeking to continue higher education study in the U.S.

Data to support this examination was derived from multiple interviews of 10 Taiwanese university students currently studying in United States who had previously studied English in Taiwan. This paper's scholarly research along with results from student interviewee data findings were key factors in forming and supporting this paper's review, analysis and conclusions.

Accordingly, a main question posed in this paper, as a result of student interviews, is to what extent do Taiwan students experience study problems in America as a result of their past educational experiences in Taiwan.

Taiwan, while the study of English is now compulsory, shows mixed results in teaching it effectively. Studies show that there is a difference in how Asian students perceive the EFL training process. The Pazaver and Wang study (2009) revealed that although Asian students may come from similar cultural and educational backgrounds, their perceptions of EFL instruction varied widely, based on their past language learning experience, and language

proficiency. Additionally, certain social and cultural practices embedded in the society influence the EFL instructional experience in the Taiwanese classroom, such as shyness and overall hesitancy to question what the teacher may say.

Moreover, the Taiwan EFL teacher, favoring a lecture only approach, adds significantly to the problem. Fu (1995) provides a very compelling statement in reference to this:

For the first seven years of my teaching in China, I taught my students exactly how I was taught-drill them with grammar patterns and phonics, quiz them every week on spelling word, drown them with tons of worksheets, bore them with analysis of every word in a sentence. I was always proud of my toughness and believed in “spare the rod, spoil the child.” Then my study in America helped me realize that my teaching style treated my students not as intelligent human beings but as senseless robots. (¶ 3)

There have been initiatives in Taiwan to adopt more effective L2 training strategies, however, there does not seem to be a consensus of opinion of what is necessary to improve overall English language training. To this point, the Ministry of Education lowered the compulsory age to begin English training from the seventh grade downwards to the sixth grade in 1990, to the fifth grade in the 2001, and to the third grade in the 2005 guidelines (Lu, 2011). Further complicating the issue, students from the major cities in northern parts of Taiwan, with higher family socio-economic status, sought and continue to seek

private school training or tutoring instead of relying on public education.

Moreover, some parents, especially in rural areas, have perceived modern training methodologies as entertainment, and a waste of time.

These issues or discrepancies, may account for how administrators, educators, students and families have mixed attitudes regarding the effectiveness of differing instructional approaches implemented in the Taiwan EFL classroom.

In the Taiwanese classroom, students for the most part do not question the teacher's authority or opinions— individualized instruction, creative problem solving and creativity are not prioritized. Liu (2001) mentions “Raising questions and offering comments in class helps students explore knowledge and develop critical thinking skills and enhances their intellectual development” (p.43).

By comparing differing approaches to classroom experiences, this paper will examine how EFL training in Taiwan prepared students for U.S. higher education, and how implementation of select teaching methodologies can improve the study experiences for Taiwanese students' planning to further their higher education training in the U.S.

Resulting data from student interview sessions which will be elaborated upon under the Data Analysis section of this paper will reinforce that EFL training in Taiwan heavily relies on a receptive approach to language training, while the U.S. approach featuring communicative aspects of language training

is the preferred teaching methodology among student interviewees who took part in my research.

A Teacher Centered Approach to English Language Training: EFL in Taiwan

I now turn to EFL scholarship to identify what factors determine the Taiwan teachers' reliance on a teacher centered approach emphasizing a more receptive methodology to EFL instruction, as opposed to a more creative approach in the U.S., which emphasizes the communicative aspects of L2 training. Hopefully, this literature review will support my data analysis findings and lead to more meaningful language training.

Taiwan, to great extent, in its EFL classroom methodology, relies on a receptive approach to language learning, focusing on listening and reading skills, or passive skills. This approach, in many ways is an outgrowth of a teacher centered approach for EFL classroom training, and has not fundamentally changed since I studied in Taipei during my grade school years.

Passive skills differ from the communication aspects of language, often characterized as the productive or active skills. In this language training model, the learner is often introduced to a receptive understanding of beginning level EFL concepts and later move on to the more productive, communicative skills. At some point, hopefully, in the language classroom the passive and productive should work harmoniously— reading, for example, should support the development of skill sets in developing writing abilities.

Althen (2003) states that in many Asian countries, students are introduced to the learning process as a receptive activity, they tend to absorb information and ideas from leading scholars passively.

In the U.S. by contrast, education is viewed more as a productive exchange or activity— it is a process of acquiring and interpreting information, where critical thinking and creativity are encouraged. In a student-centered learning environment, students will customarily take an active role in their learning and the responsibilities of planning, organizing, and lesson content. They have a variety of choices about what they learn and how they learn (Wu and Huang, 2007). This is at the heart of the communicative approach.

If the communicative approach to language training presents so many benefits for the learner, an important question must be raised: Why do educators in Taiwan still emphasize a receptive style approach to EFL training, and moreover, what factors cause this reliance?

In the Taiwan teacher-centered training environment a direct consequence is that memorization as a learning strategy, seems to be an almost unavoidable consequence for students. Chen (2004) explains, “In Taiwan the best way to learn is to memorize it. In this type of learning style students do not do as much critical thinking; they simply practice more. They only know what the teachers give them” (p.3).

Studies have shown that teacher-centered education in Taiwan results in making students overly passive, indifferent to what is being taught and hesitant

to question the teacher's authority. With such an over emphasis on a teacher centered education and over reliance on student memorization as a backdrop, it is not surprising that with an absence of critical thinking and creative problem solving, higher level communicative L2 skills are not acquired.

Overemphasis on National Exams for Educational Advancement

All students in Taiwan are under great pressure to do well on Taiwanese education system exams— exams which not only evaluate one's abilities in technical subjects like mathematics and science, but also in the English language— While strict EFL grammatical rules and knowledge of vocabulary are emphasized, creativity and critical thinking play a small, and often non-existent role.

Taiwan's exam-based system is rigid, with success based on one's ability to memorize. If a high school student wishes to advance to the next level of study, one has to memorize a great amount of information— including the strict rules of grammar as presented in the EFL curriculum.

As Yang (1995) states:

“One test can decide a person's whole life,” runs a popular Chinese saying. All students, regardless of their intended major or career goals, must take the grueling, two-day Joint University Entrance Examination....a series of multiple-choice and essay questions based on the standardized textbooks used at all Taiwan high schools. (¶ 2)

Unfortunately, the preoccupation with test taking and test preparation, underscores missed opportunities to develop other important skills sets—including creative problem solving, innovative thinking and original idea generation.

Absence of a Uniform Language Training Policy in Taiwan Schools

According to Chang (2002), based upon the decision made by the Ministry of Education, different elementary schools can decide on different policies regarding when students should start official English studies. Some schools introduce EFL education from the first grade, some from the third grade, and so on. The real problem arises when all these students with such differing levels of English proficiency reach high school or college— How does a teacher implement effective L2 teaching strategies, in a large classroom filled with students of differing levels of English proficiency? In such a traditional classroom, as Tseng (1993) observes, “The teacher dominates the floor of speaking throughout the classroom session, and the students simply sit and listen. They [the students] seldom initiate talking” (p.136). As Su (2006) describes the Taiwan L2 classroom, “EFL teachers had to plan their English classes with the constraints on a large class of students with mixed levels of proficiency, limited teaching hours and resources” (p. 265).

The above scholarly research and observations make me reflect on my own study experience in Taiwan, and how the teacher centered, receptive approach remains a dominant teaching methodology. Moreover, I also reflect

upon the positive learning experiences I have come to appreciate in the U.S. in the higher education training environment.

Without question, Taiwan students seeking to continue their studies in the United States, face a unique set of challenges and opportunities. As such, Asian international students need to go through a period of adapting to the new American experience, a period of personal growth, developing the necessary social skills for success in terms of global communication (Liu, 2001).

This personal growth may take time for the international learner to achieve, but it does appear to happen, over time, in a positive way, as students pursue their U.S. studies and comfort level increases. Liu (2001) presents an interesting perspective in her discussion of “adaptive cultural transformation” (p.220) and its implications for Asian higher education students in the U.S.— in other words, there are positive benefits for these students in terms of educational and personal growth, as long as they remain involved and engaged in the learning process and the surrounding environments. These benefits can happen naturally.

In the ESL classroom in America, students are allowed to incorporate their personal experiences into the learning process, it invites them to become part of an interactive learning process, where the teacher is more of a facilitator who creates a positive learning environment.

To be fair, efforts to encourage critical thinking and creativity has gained some momentum in Taiwan. Kabilan (2000) comments that the now popular

communicative approach to language teaching, which emphasizes the use of language as a communication tool, does not really help students to become proficient in the target language. He suggests that for learners to be proficient in a language, they need to be able to think creatively and critically.

Pollock (2009) brings an interesting perspective— that success in the L2 training process has more to do with creating an intellectually rich learning environment for young minds. It's about bringing to the classroom creative problem solving techniques from the real world and putting it in the schools.

It appears that if a harmony can exist between the receptive and communicative approaches to L2 methodologies, students will experience a more productive learning environment, whether they study in Taiwan, or in the U.S.

Data and Methodology

Participants for my research project were recruited from the Taiwanese Student Association- at a U.S. regional university. Association members are primarily students from Taiwan, pursuing degree track studies. The Taiwanese Student Association assists students in adapting to life in the United States and building life-long relationships. Since the Taiwanese Student Association holds regular meetings and social gatherings, I had ample opportunities to invite students to participate as interviewees in my research project. Please see script used to recruit students (see Appendix A).

There were 10 student participants involved in this study. The ages of students are between 20-35 years, their ethnicity was primarily Taiwanese, and members are both male and female who are currently enrolled at the university as either B.A. or M.A. degree track students. Student participants have studied EFL previously in Taiwan, prior to beginning their education at the university. On average students had studied English for ten years in Taiwan and for an average of two years in the U.S.

Tables indicating dates and duration of data collection (Table 1) and lengths of time interviewees studied English in both Taiwan and America (Table 2) are shown below.

Table 1. Date Collection Schedule

No.	Name	Date of data collection	Duration
1	John	8/17/2016	0:14:32
2	Peter	8/18/2016	0:19:57
3	Ariel	9/21/2016	0:12:31
4	Bob	9/22/2016	0:12:07
5	Jerry	10/10/2016	0:18:00
6	Mary	10/10/2016	0:18:32
7	Tom	10/10/2016	0:21:55
8	Wendy	10/10/2016	0:16:30
9	Lisa	10/14/2016	0:16:16
10	Steven	10/27/2016	0:35:54

Table 2. History of Study English: in Taiwan and in the United States

No.	Name	Taiwan (year)	U.S. (year)
1	John	20	1.5
2	Peter	15	1
3	Ariel	7	3
4	Bob	6	3
5	Jerry	10	2.5
6	Mary	10	2
7	Tom	15	3
8	Wendy	10	2
9	Lisa	14	2
10	Steven	16	1.3

Qualitative (interview) research methodology was used for this study.

The interview is by far the most common method of qualitative data collection (Donalek, 2005). For quantitative research purposes, there were 10 questions developed to learn more about student experiences, attitudes and expectations as they came to the United States for ESL training and other higher education pursuits (Appendix B). Again, for the purposes of this study, participants were required to be a Taiwanese student with experience in the American college study system, who had previous EFL training in Taiwan.

Ten students were selected for the interview process. Each interview lasted about 20 to 30 minutes, as the researcher attempted to encourage and engage students, trying to make them more relaxed and open to dialog.

Donalek (2005) mentions, "A qualitative research interview is a shared journey. The resulting description is not simply the participant's elicited recall of past

experiences but a co-created work emerging from the interaction of researcher and participant” (p.1).

Analysis was an integral part of my overall project design. In this regard, both data collection and analysis of resulting data were the key elements of the overall analysis process. Regarding data collection, qualitative (interview) research methodology was followed to gather observations, opinions, information and knowledge from participating Taiwanese students—those who had already lived and experienced American college life. The data analysis phase, which follows, will address interview research results, providing feedback and direction for this project’s overall design process.

I selected the interview qualitative method for gathering data, in that this approach provides unique opportunities to engage students through compelling social interaction. As Palmer (1928) states:

Any interview constitutes a social situation between two individuals; it is a process of continuous, spiral interaction in which one person’s response to the stimulation of another in turn becomes the stimulation for another response (p.171).

The logic behind my qualitative approach was to encourage open dialogue with students allowing them to speak openly about their learning backgrounds and their concerns. A distinct challenge was dealing with second language learners, and ensuring what they were articulating was accurately communicated in English. I feel this was accomplished successfully, as I rarely

had to resort to our native Mandarin language as part of the interview process. As Mason (2002) explains, “According to this perspective, meanings and understandings are created in an interaction, which is effectively a co-production, involving researcher and interviewees” (p.63).

The data resulting from the interview research questions provided positive feedback and direction for this project, helping to identify key themes, patterns or concerns among students as part of this paper’s examination. The aim was to obtain information, attitudes and perceptions related to the topic questions being researched for data results. The list of interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

Analysis

In analyzing my data results there are certain patterns that emerged among student interviewees responses—certain viewpoints which participants held in common. These overall patterns were articulated by a wide majority of participants, as well as echoed by many of the positions held by scholarly writings mentioned in the literature review section of this paper.

Such main patterns included: 1) Drawbacks of Teacher-Centered Education in Taiwan, 2) Benefits of Studying in the United States and 3) Overreliance on Student Memorization.

Drawbacks of Teacher-Centered Education in Taiwan

Eight students (80 %) of participants identified as problematic the teacher centered class in Taiwan. As one example, student interviewee Tom's comment reflected the attitude of the majority of students when he commented, "In Taiwan, teachers don't want you to have an opinion. Teachers don't want you to questioning about what they teach. The class has no conversation, very quiet, students just read their own textbook" (Oct. 2016). To view a complete list of student interviewee opinions please see Appendix C, Table 3. Student interviewees overall held the opinion that there is an overly rigid teaching environment in Taiwan— in other words, a teacher's opinion is not to be questioned. This strict control factor exhibited by the Taiwan teacher as articulated by student interviewees, in many ways reinforces the scholarly observations presented in this paper.

Althen (2003) states that in many Asian countries, students are introduced to the learning process as a receptive activity, they tend to absorb information and ideas from leading scholars passively. Moreover, Liu (2001) mentions:

These shared traits are reflected in the deeply rooted Asian concept of face-saving... The blind obedience to the teacher expressed by listening attentively and concealing and tolerating disagreement, the sense of guilt in expressing disagreement with authority figures, and self-discipline in solving problems through reading the textbook. (p. 176)

On this topic, it is interesting to note that In Taiwanese society, one must remember that academic achievement is viewed as the key to advancement—starting in preschool and progressing into elementary, then high school and then college. College entry exams, as discussed earlier in this paper, are highly competitive in Taiwan, and parents begin training their children for entrance exams at a very early age. This strict approach to learning as emphasized in the teacher centered classroom, does get results in terms of grades, but not necessarily in terms of educational values and affective learning.

According to Wanless, Scharphorn, Chiu, Chen and Chen (2015), “Prior research in Taiwan found that some teachers believed they should establish their authority and respect in the classroom to teach their students most effectively...which emphasizes respect for authority” (Beliefs about students section, ¶ 2).

Overall comments from student interviewees suggest that the teacher-centered approach to classroom is still followed in the Taiwan training environment.

Benefits of Studying in the United States

It is interesting to note that in their comments all ten student interviewees (100 %) unanimously indicated that their learning benefitted from studying in the U.S. host environment – due to the presence of native teachers, instructors who show sensitivity to student concerns, and where English is the medium for instruction in and outside of the classroom. Moreover, there is a real sense that

the student interviewees are enjoying the challenge, becoming engaged in the target culture and thus benefitting from the ESL learning process.

It is also interesting to note that most student interviewees indicated a feeling of substantial personal and academic growth after only spending a short amount of study time in the U.S. This is indeed a very compelling viewpoint.

Student interviewee Bob added insight concerning U.S. higher education teaching style:

Study here has a lot advantages. First, most teachers are native speaker, they can teach us in a “real” speak. Second, I want to re-emphasize of making the speaking environment, because everyone is speaking in English here, if you don’t know how to speak, you cannot survive here. (personal communication, September 22, 2016)

For a complete list of student observations please refer to Appendix C.

Table 4.

Liu (2001) statement here is very telling:

Asian students in the United States are in a situation in which they are required to cope with substantial cultural changes in classrooms, on campus, on the street, in communities, and in various social settings. Adaptive cultural transformation occurs naturally and necessarily regardless of the intentions of the individuals as long as they continuously engage in communication with the host environment and are functionally dependent in it. (p. 220)

It should also be mentioned that while Taiwan students overwhelmingly praised the U.S. style teacher, they also felt that the overall learning environment contributed to the positive learning— encouragement to be open, creative, make friends and experience the American culture. This cannot be overlooked as a positive influence and motivational factor for the international student coming to America to learn a new language...and culture. This certainly reinforces the communicative approach to L2 language methodology as discussed earlier in my paper.

Overreliance on Student Memorization

A third theme, or pattern, echoed by student interviewees as part of their comments is an over reliance on memorization as a learning tool in Taiwan – which may lead to a lack of student critical thinking, creativity and problem solving. This overall observation was articulated by a majority of students, eight students (80 %) of participants and became a central theme in their comments. Student Lisa commented very directly on this:

In my opinion, I think EFL educational programs still have room to improve. In Taiwan, schools and teachers focus on grammar and vocabularies too much. For example, if we need to read an article, teacher would just tell us ok remember this vocabulary ok remember this tense. Instead of understand the whole content of the article, I feel like everything is just memorizing and we don't really absorb the information from the article (personal communication, October 14, 2016).

Althen (2003) comments:

Students have traditionally excelled by memorizing large quantities of material provided by professors, authors or other experts. In the United States, by contrast, being able to memorize material is less important than being able to analyze and synthesize material from many sources and to develop one's own ideas and viewpoints. (p. 2)

It is apparent, as a result of analyzing student attitudes here, that when one memorizes only facts, one may end up with just facts, moreover a lack of meaning, or context. While facts are important, simply memorizing facts in the long run won't be as helpful to students as knowledge that's actually understood, analyzed through creative problem solving or critical thinking. This may in part explain why students expressed such strong reaction to the question posed in findings (Appendix C, Table 5). They seemed to overwhelmingly agree that critical thinking, problem solving and creative analysis are indispensable parts of the learning process.

Discussion

As a result of data analysis of interview research, it appears evident that all interviewees experienced an overall positive experience with the American education system. And when compared with that of Taiwan, felt that there was much in the U.S. higher education system which could benefit Taiwan in terms of its L2 instruction.

But this is not to suggest that all in the Taiwan L2 training environment should be viewed negatively. The reality is that in Taiwan, the focus of English education has been and still is, to a great extent, tied to passing a National Examination, an exam which holds the keys to advancement, job security and socio-economic mobility. Here, memorization, not only in L2 learning, but in overall core subjects, plays a key role for passing the exam and getting better paying jobs. Student interviewee, Steven, in reference to this explains, “It may be difficult to change...it is a cultural thing...all society believes in this way...If we are going to change, the whole education system has to change” (personal communication, October 27, 2016).

However, this does not deter from the fact that for the Taiwan student seeking to continue studying in the U.S., earn a professional degree and have a career in the new global community, ESL competency is still part of the success formula. English is now the global language of business, and many Taiwanese students seek the best L2 training possible to help them realize their career goals (Neeley, 2012).

The views articulated by interviewees in the above, along with the scholarly discussions presented, hopefully will shed some light on improving EFL training strategies in Taiwan and well as for those students seeking to continue their studies in the U.S.in the future.

Liu (2001) comments:

When Asian students leave their own countries for the United States to pursue their academic studies, they start a boundary-crossing journey, this journey that is full of adventure. The successful completion of that journey is determined by the extent to which they adapt to the target culture. (p. 221)

Two additional findings can be found in Appendix C (Table 6 and 7). They include student interviewee responses comparing student English reading, writing, speaking and listening skill levels in Taiwan versus their improved skills after studying in America.

Conclusion

In respect to the results of data analysis and review of scholarship, it is probably not surprising that the teacher centered classroom and reliance on memorization which leads to a lack of critical thinking and creativity are somehow interrelated— In a teacher dominated classroom environment, it can often be a sign of disrespect to question the teacher's authority. The student thus resorts to memorization and does not seize the opportunity to critically analyze nor challenge.

The tendency to memorize is perhaps built into the education fabric in Taiwan. Part of this concern may stem from an over emphasis and focus on math and science. Taiwan and other growing Asian economies have built

thriving economies by focusing on math and science training. Creativity has not been prioritized.

However, as the importance of English spreads across the globe Taiwan is slowly coming to recognize the need to embrace English and make it an important component in its education curriculum framework. In fact, for several years EFL training has been compulsory learning beginning at the elementary school level.

Many educators in Taiwan understand that an effective L2 English program can render powerful rewards. For the teacher, there is a sense of accomplishment in making a difference in the academic life of a student, equipping them with effective second language skills, guiding them to be part of the international community.

Taiwan, however, has still not moved in a direction to fully adopt modern training strategies — the lecture and the extended teacher-led presentation, remain the key teaching methodologies used in the Taiwan classroom.

As mentioned earlier, resistance to change is somehow tied to the memorization mania and the need for students to perform well on National Examinations, its pathways to jobs or the island country's overall socio-economic goal of building a strong economy and international alliances.

Or perhaps, there is a simpler explanation— that any kind of change just takes time... including L2 English language planning— it may be that Taiwan is

destined to follow a long-term plan, requiring a sustained effort on the part of those interested in improving EFL training standards.

On a positive note, the data analysis of interviewee comments contained in chapter 2, reveal that my student participants, because of their unique background and training in both Taiwan and America, have a real sense of what L2 training can...and should be. A successful L2 teacher must address the learning style of the learner, the learner becomes motivated, and the classroom environment must provide resources and values that strongly reinforce the language learning process (Oxford, 1996).

This goes to the importance of embracing more of a communicative approach — where a harmony should exist between the receptive and the communicative, for effective language learning to take place. As articulated by the interviewee comments, there is a longing to have Taiwan adopt more effective L2 teaching strategies – lessons where students are engaged in the learning process, not just recipients of teacher lecture material...a teaching program where opportunities for critical thinking, student engagement and creative problem solving are incorporated into the overall learning process. In the absence of this students feel they may miss out on important learning experiences derived through conversation, understanding, and appreciating others.

Improving Taiwan's L2 language methodologies should not only benefit Taiwan public education programs, but also better prepare Taiwanese students

seeking to pursue higher education training in the U.S. Undoubtedly; these students will face enormous obstacles in adapting to a new American culture and training environment.

Scholarly research, as included in this paper, indeed supports many of the student observations contained in data analysis. To this point, Lisa's comments on EFL training programs in Taiwan advises teachers to change their training styles— they shouldn't over rely on just one method to teach, they should strive to bring in outside materials, make students read outside sources, in other words make students think critically. Wendy comments also echo this theme:

Most obvious difference is the power distance. In Taiwan, it is less likely to feel that your instructors are close to you and we are required to be obedient and follow the rules... power distance is pretty low here which shortens the distance between instructors and students. (personal communication, October 10, 2016)

Lee (n.d.) comments, "Cultural differences also played a significant role in classroom success. Many Asian students would not feel comfortable when required to argue a certain issue, since they felt this showed disrespect for their teacher" (Introduction section, ¶ 3).

Lisa's observations are reinforced by Lee (n.d.) and Ronesi (1995) suggesting it may be over reliance on a teacher-centered L2 instructional

environment in Asia which results in students failing to feel engaged—where critical thinking and creative abilities are not prioritized.

In an overall sense, this project's research shows that in the Taiwan educational system, students get by as long as they follow instructions. This practice still continues in Taiwan, even at the college level. Classroom discussion is not encouraged, nor is individual or creative thinking. Even if a student graduates with high scores on an English Proficiency Test, they may find it difficult to find success when they are engaged by a native speaker. If a Taiwanese student is not trained to be an active learner, or self-starter, they may find great difficulty being successful in their English learning program.

As student interviewee, Steven, so aptly described:

The class environment is better here...I feel I am part of being a class member, people here are very friendly and open, they interact with you.

In Taiwan, I feel I do not fit into a class. I also can tell that an environment can really change people...it not only affected me, I can clearly tell that Asian students from other countries, when they come to a class, they change...I feel we are all part of the group in the classroom, unlike in Taiwan. (personal communication, October 27, 2016)

As Liu (2001) comments:

Except for the initial stage, adaptive changes are typically so gradual and subtle, that they may not be recognized by the Asian students themselves, but they adapt and change as long as they are engaged

with the target culture through communication. Naturally the classroom setting is one of the most important communication channels for Asian students. (p.220)

A recommendation from student interviewee, Jerry, was very impressive— it goes to the importance of creativity in learning the process, something Taiwan is lacking: he commented, “I think if English teachers can bring English culture into the class, not just teaching language...like my conversation teacher he taught us to sing a song” (personal communication, October 10, 2016). A song can speak to the heart...while it helps a student develop English language proficiency.

An important observation I made as part of developing my thesis project, is how much I share in terms of similar outlook and understanding with my project's interviewees— students of the same Taiwanese cultural background. While each student experienced English language training in their home country, and whether it began in elementary or middle school, each felt that their English competency vastly improved at CSUSB, and in just a short time period, compared to the 10 to 15 years of studying EFL in Taiwan. This is indeed impressive. First it speaks very highly of the English training environment at CSUSB, but even more importantly, it speaks to the need to improve L2 learning methodologies in my home country Taiwan.

APPENDIX A

SCRIPT

My name is Ying-Mei (Amy) Chien and I am a graduate student at CSUSB. I am creating a research project titled "Examining Experiences with English Language Studies in Taiwan and in the U.S.", designed to improve the quality of ESL training in the Taiwan educational system.

I am inviting students to participate in an interview session on campus at CSUSB. The interview will last approximately 20 to 30 minutes, whereby you will be asked to answer a few questions regarding your ESL training experiences.

Answers to questions will be audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed for educational purposes as part of my research project. Participant contact information will be kept confidential and only opinions and suggestions of participants will be posted or made a part of my thesis.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any questions and can freely withdraw from participation at any time.

It is understood that participants must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study, and have read and agree to the terms of the consent document.

APPENDIX B

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. English is often described as the most influential foreign language in Taiwan. Do you believe this to be accurate and why?
2. How long did you study ESL in Taiwan?
3. What is your opinion of the ESL education program in Taiwan?
4. What are main problems with Taiwan ESL training program?
5. How long have you been in America?
6. What is your opinion of the American ESL education program?
7. What problems did you encounter adapting to the American study style?
8. What are the main differences between Taiwanese and American teaching styles?
9. Which American ESL training methods would prove helpful in the Taiwan? Why?
10. How can overall ESL teacher training be improved in Taiwan?
11. How can the Taiwanese teacher create the right blend of casual conversation versus strict grammar lessons?
12. In your opinion, would bringing more foreign native ESL teachers into Taiwanese classrooms make a positive impact on the quality of ESL instruction in Taiwan? And explain why.

Note: Developed by Ying-Mei Chien, June 2016

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW RESULTS

Table 3

Opinions: effectiveness of Taiwan EFL Teachers

Name	Director Quotes
John	"In Taiwan, we think a teacher is a teacher, so when a teacher comes to the classroom, they just start to teaching, they write down everything on the board...So you don't have too much interaction with teachers."
Peter	"Taiwanese students do not have many opportunities to focus on English speaking because English is not their native language so the weakness of the EFL education program is no English speaking environment for teaching students."
Bob	"The teacher in Taiwan just wants you remember vocabulary or read the articles. But you don't know how to speak and how to use the vocabulary you remembered. It only for testing."
Mary	"In Taiwan, teachers don't want you to have an opinion. Teachers don't want you to questioning about what they teach. The class has no conversation, very quiet, students just read their own textbook."
Tom	"I don't like how teachers teach in Taiwan because they are very intensive. They always tell you do this, read this, they make you uncomfortable. And the way they teach are not really useful in the life in Taiwan. In the classroom, I don't really use English either...unless teachers are foreigner."
Wendy	"The most obvious difference is the power distance. In Taiwan, it is less likely to feel that your instructors are close to you and we are required to obedient and follow the rules. Collectivism runs deep in Taiwanese culture."
Lisa	"In my opinion, in Taiwan, teachers tend to tell students to memorize everything and I feel like everything students do is for the test."
Steven	"Teachers just want you to study, memorize every single detail, and just prepare the test. Once you pass, you get into a college, nobody studies. In Taiwanese education, there is no goal for students, you study to go better college..that is just force you to memorize, just mimicking, not goal."

Table 4

Opinions: effectiveness of U.S. Teaching

Name	Director Quotes
John	"In America, they (teachers) will try to talk with you, talk about their life and your life first, and try to get you involve. They will motivate you in the class environment. So I will prefer...like America style."
Peter	"The ESL program effectively offers education system for international students, especially English writing and speaking. Students can further learn English skills such as face-to-face communication and writing formats. They also understand American culture and education differences compare to Taiwanese education and culture."
Ariel	"America program encourages you speak more and learn more but in Taiwan we more focus on reading and writing because of the test. Here is more lifestyle learning, helps to develop communication skill."
Bob	"The teacher here is more creative. They do not want to give you answer directly. They want you to think about the whole background...ask you to do a group project, they (teachers) want you to present your ideas, your opinions in the class."
Jerry	"For many things...I will say I really like that my biology class here, every class I took, they will put a theoretical lecture with experiment once a week, so basically what you have learned from the theory, you use it right away. So you learned something not just from a book, you learned something what you can walk with."
Mary	"A teacher wants to learn independently. Professor here wants students to build autonomy."
Tom	"Here, teachers encourage you to talk in the class...like I have mentioned before, this makes students more confident to speak English. Let students feel confident is important. Also, here, teacher give you more time more space to do your assignment, not just only finish assignment and go and later forget right away."
Wendy	"People are used to give compliments and with compliments, I get confidence in practicing English."
Lisa	"I really liked how they do the placement test and gave us an oral interview first because it helped teachers and ourselves to have a better idea that where our English level is. In the class, they didn't only teach grammar and vocabularies...It gave us a chance to utilize what we learned in the class instead of tests and exams. As a student, I would say the ESL program in the U.S. definitely has more variety than Taiwan's. I really enjoyed every class and teachers were really helpful if students have any questions."
Steven	"The class environment is better here. Also, study here, I feel I am part of class member, people here is very friendly and open, they interact with you."

Table 5

Opinions: Memorization as learning technique in Taiwan

Name	Director Quotes
John	My opinion English speaking environment should create first. It allows students have more opportunity for using English...Basically they just taught me to memorize vocabulary, grammar and everything.
Peter	In Taiwan, my teacher didn't focus on English speaking in a class. We didn't have many opportunities to focus on English speaking and listening. Just only focus on grammar, reading, and how to prepare for exams.
Bob	I think it is useless. Because they only focus on vocabulary and grammar, not very focus on speaking.
Mary	I feel like...uh...in Taiwan, the teacher always tell you to memorize everything. And when I was in an elementary school, I remember that teacher ask us to memorize vocabulary, grammar structure.
Tom	I like the teaching style here better than in Taiwan. Because how they teach here is they encourage you to think and learn from yourself (critical thinking). Not like Taiwan, they just give you a lot (they cram you).
Wendy	It is true that I have been learning English for a long period. However, the lectures put more emphasis on English reading and writing. We don't actually have chance to speak in English. The way we learn English is all based on countless exams which is efficient to know the basic knowledge in English but definitely not the best approach to get familiar with a language. Taiwan's ESL ignores the essence of learning a language which is sad.
Lisa	In my opinion, I think EFL educational programs still have room to improve. In Taiwan, schools and teachers focus on grammar and vocabularies too much. For example, if we need to read an article, teacher would just tell us ok remember this vocabulary ok remember this tense. Instead of understanding the whole content of the article, I feel like everything is just memorizing and we don't really absorb the information from the article.
Steven	When I studied in high school, every learning became to memorize because of college entrance exam. What you learn is testing your English ability but not teach you English. I think this is a big problem for Taiwan education, just memorize everything and pass a test. The vocabulary, grammar and writing you learn is all about a test. After the test, you forget everything.

Table 6

Rate your English skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening before coming to America

No	Name	Taiwan (year)	Direct Quotes
1	John	20	"If I have to rate like, 1-10, the rate will be 2 points of each aspect."
2	Peter	15	"I think my English skills were poor in reading, writing, listening, and speaking before I came to America."
3	Ariel	7	"I think my listening and speaking are more way better than writing and reading."
4	Bob	6	"In Taiwan, I think reading and writing is ok, but listening and speaking, I think I have trouble in these parts."
5	Jerry	10	"If the scale between 1-10, my reading is 6, writing is pretty weak, maybe 3, my listening and speaking maybe 7."
6	Mary	10	"On the scale 1-10, I rate my reading scale on 5, writing on 5... In listening, maybe 6 or 7, for speaking, maybe 6 or 7."
7	Tom	15	"Listening and speaking are half-half, but for reading and writing, I am not well."
8	Wendy	10	"I would say proficient in reading, moderate in writing, moderate in listening and poor in speaking."
9	Lisa	14	"From scale 1-10, I would give myself 3-4 in reading because I didn't know a lot of vocabulary. For writing I give myself a 2. Listening and speaking are both 4-5."
10	Steven	16	"If scale on 1-5, listening is 5, speaking is probably 4, reading and writing in 3."

Table 7

Rate your English skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening today

No	Name	U.S. (year)	Direct Quotes
1	John	1.5	"Today, I may rate like 6 points in each aspect."
2	Peter	1	"So far my English skills... reading is good, writing is intermediate, listening is intermediate, and speaking is fair."
3	Ariel	3	"Today I will say all of my skills are on average."
4	Bob	3	"Compare to I have just been here 3 years, I feel much better on reading and writing...Even my speaking is still not good, I feel much better when I learned in Taiwan."
5	Jerry	2.5	"Of course I improved. I feel my writing is still the same, I just more get used to writing more scientifically... But my reading is 7 now, listening and speaking are probably 8-9, definitely is improving."
6	Mary	2	"I feel like I was evaluating my scale too high. Before I came here, before I interact with English native speaker here, I thought my English was ok. But after I came here, reading is hard, I need write academically, need speak with native speakers, I feel no confidence. I feel challenge. But overall, I am in TESOL program a year now, I feel I learn more than I studied in Taiwan."
7	Tom	3	"Reading and writing improves a lot since I have to use in the class. For listening and speaking improves a lot as well since I use everyday."
8	Wendy	2	"I would say proficient in reading, intermediate in writing, intermediate in listening and intermediate in speaking."
9	Lisa	2	"Right now...I would give myself 6 for reading...For writing I would give myself 5-6. In university I learned a lot about academic writing, like the structures of essays and citations. For listening I would give myself 7-8."
10	Steven	1.3	"Reading and writing in 4, speaking is 4.5 and listening is still 5."

Note: Personal communications from interviews, see Table 1.

APPENDIX D
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD



Academic Affairs
Office of Academic Research • Institutional Review Board

June 02, 2016

Ms. Ying-Mei Chien and Prof. Caroline Vickers
Department of English
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

**CSUSB
INSTITUTIONAL
REVIEW BOARD**
Expedited Review
IRB# 15075
Status
APPROVED

Dear Ms. Chien and Prof. Vickers:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Improving English Language Studies in Taiwan" has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The attached informed consent document has been stamped and signed by the IRB chairperson. All subsequent copies used must be this officially approved version. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended. **Your application is approved for one year from June 02, 2016 through June 01, 2017. One month prior to the approval end date you need to file for a renewal if you have not completed your research. See additional requirements (Items 1 – 4) of your approval below.**

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following 4 requirements as mandated by the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 listed below. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years. Please notify the IRB Research Compliance Officer for any of the following:

- 1) **Submit a protocol change form if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your research protocol for review and approval of the IRB before implemented in your research,**
- 2) **If any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research,**
- 3) **To apply for renewal and continuing review of your protocol one month prior to the protocols end date,**
- 4) **When your project has ended by emailing the IRB Research Compliance Officer.**

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Judy Sylva

Judy Sylva, Ph.D., Chair
Institutional Review Board

JS/MG

909.537.7588 • fax: 909.537.7028 • <http://irb.csusb.edu>

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