

Impact of Learning a Second Foreign Language on Teenagers

Hongyu Zhou

Guangdong Country Garden School, Foshan, China

Email: Zhouhongyu2023@163.com

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Abstract

Nowadays, due to increased communication and globalization, the need for a second foreign language is becoming crucial. Meeting the need for better communication with more people, understanding other cultures better, or achieving success, including the current international situation, are motivating factors for people to learn a second foreign language. In order to seek encouraging factors for teenagers, this paper focused on researching the circumstances of Chinese middle school students in learning a second foreign language. From this work, I have gained the results of 50 Chinese students, specifically interviewing 10 students for detailed information. I discovered that interest is the most significant motivation component in encouraging students to learn a second foreign language and persist when difficulties appear. Girls have comparatively longer time and higher grades than boys. Moreover, after their study, learners receive many interior benefits, especially in being confident and accepting of foreign cultures. In my paper, I wish to explore the inner significance of studying a second foreign language, and delve into its benefits, adversaries, future influence, and attitude for each individual.

Keywords

Second Foreign Language, Chinese Teenager, Data Collection and Analysis

1. Introduction

The second foreign language refers to another foreign language besides one's first foreign language learning. For example, for a Chinese student who has Chinese as their mother language (which can be also interpreted as first language), if he learns English in school, then his first foreign language is English (which can be also interpreted as second language). Moreover, if they learn Japanese in addition, his second foreign language is Japanese (which can be also interpreted as third language).

The reasons for people learning a second foreign language could be diverse. Sometimes, people learn a second foreign language because of the need to communicate with others, especially in trade, higher education, administration, or in staying in countries with multilingual cultures. Sometimes, a second foreign language may be learned in both formal and informal ways, such as in schools, in families, or by absorption.

In today's world, the increasingly prevalent communication methods have connected us to a more diverse range of individuals. With the study of the language, students can now better understand and communicate with their peers from all corners of the globe. Similarly, business professionals can expand their networks and access more opportunities for business development. This unique skill enables them to engage with a wider range of people, broaden one's social cycle.

People could acquire a variety of knowledge and perspectives through learning a foreign language. Language helps us to understand the world better, which beyond just words and grammar. Knowledge of the society and culture behind that language is necessary to achieve language fluency. The history and cultures of a country are reflected in the language, and vice versa. Learners could be motivated to talk with the language speakers or even encouraged to go to the countries. Thus, instead of getting knowledge from edited books or websites, they could learn the inner part of the country with a deeper understanding. In a wider scope, people could access the world better, broaden their horizons, and bring them closer to people of all races and nationalities.

2. Methodology

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Meta-Analysis 1

According to [Singhal \(1997\)](#), in addition to being a supplement to reading materials, especially for current information, when students are exploring the internet, they are essentially exploring the real world. This scanning or exploration can also lead to incidental learning as they encounter various information, and some knowledge about a second foreign language can be learned. This indicates that it is helpful for students to access the internet and learn new knowledge that is related to the language.

2.1.2. Meta-Analysis 2

For starters, they may not know which languages they would have to choose to achieve the best results in learning. A new and highly rigorous language measure device, Hi-Lab, has been invented to help determine which U.S. military should be assigned to which languages would be advantageous for them ([Linck et al., 2013](#)). This new language testing model should be used by teaching institutions and schools for students to be more aware of which language to learn so that it helps them to reduce their fear of learning. Thus, more students would be willing to engage in learning a second foreign language, and the parents may also wish their kids to develop a new skill.

2.1.3. Meta-Analysis 3

It is commonly believed that motivation to use the language would be greater among learners living in the community where the second foreign language (SFL) was spoken before the wide use of the internet. In today's increasingly globalized world, there are new ways for foreign language learners to become just as motivated, if not more so. It is also possible to be in a second language community and not take advantage of a second foreign language. Research shows that learner motivation plays an important role regardless of how supportive the environment is for language learning (Wyner & Cohen, 2015). It has shown that no matter what the surrounding environmental factors are, the main determinant for students to learn an SFL is still related to the motivation of the students. Moreover, the appearance and development of the Internet, especially online teaching, has promoted the efficiency and availability of students to learn an SFL.

2.1.4. Meta-Analysis 4

As Copenhagen Business School (Selmer & Fenner, 2009) points out, "Through a very important business language program, the school is constantly improving and upgrading its operations." in this way, the graduates can meet the expectations and demands of the future workplace. This claim is increasingly being made in literature published by business schools around the world. Research conducted in 1993 by the Deutsche Bundesamt (Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft) produced an interesting and useful "wish list" that shows what employers want from graduates. The list, in rank order of the perceived significance for the job market, is as follows:

- 1) Flexibility and adaptability;
- 2) Foreign languages;
- 3) Practical experience in (local) industry;
- 4) Comprehensive and thorough study program;
- 5) Computer skills;
- 6) Marks achieved;
- 7) Having lived (and worked) overseas;
- 8) The particular university at which degree is taken;
- 9) Doctoral degree;
- 10) Foreign degree.

"Business is always and in any context looking for the language skill in conjunction with some other skill or expertise." The research showed that from external employee training to the hiring preferences of the companies, the importance of sophistication in an SFL has increased drastically, which meant that its learning also needs to be valued. In the future study, the learning of a SFL could also become prevalent in many educational institutions.

2.1.5. Meta-Analysis 5

Overall, bilinguals were found to show cognitive advantages over monolinguals on a variety of conflict resolutions and interference suppression tests, which is thought to come from repeated and regular language control exercises. This idea is supported by imaging studies (Hernandez & Meschyan, 2006), where language control and executive functions show that they are served by the same brain regions even at low levels of a second language. This suggests a strong relationship between bilingualism and executive control. The research and data have reflected the close connection between bilingual language use and executive control.

Bilingual speakers, even with a lower proficiency, are still relatively advantageous in cognitive ability. Due to repetitive practice in language control, they would behave better in finding solutions when facing a dilemma compared to monolinguals.

2.1.6. Meta-Analysis 6

Researchers not only use non-verbal cognitive tasks to find differences between groups with different language backgrounds but also accumulate their attention to the impact of language experience on special groups, such as patients who have Alzheimer's. Research has shown that a lifetime of bilingual experience can delay cognitive decline effectively, which they call "cognitive reserve." *Bialystok, Craik, and Freedman (2007)* analyzed hospital records of Alzheimer's patients and found that monolingual dementia patients developed dementia symptoms four years earlier than bilingual dementia patients, even though monolingual dementia patients had longer years of education. This finding is also supported by other studies (*Craik, Bialystok, & Freedman, 2010*). In general, the longer a person's years of education, the better his/her cognitive development is, but the study found that bilingual patients with fewer years of education developed dementia symptoms later. These results suggest that bilingual learning and use experience have a protective effect on cognitive ability and can effectively delay cognitive decline in bilinguals. The findings of the language experience on special groups such as Alzheimer's patients have proven that speaking or using a second foreign language lifelong would delay the cognitive decline effectively and could protect cognitive ability.

2.1.7. Meta-Analysis 7

Philp and Tognini (2009) have pointed out a noticeable feature of Teaching-Learning (T-L) interaction is its high incidence of the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) discourse pattern, which reflects the institutional nature of T-L classroom discourse (*Hall, 1998, 2007; Hall & Walsh, 2002; Havranek, 2002; Ohta, 2001; Tognini, 2008; Van Lier, 2014*). This structure shows the privileged position of the teacher who initiates the topics to discuss and may choose speakers. This tends to restrict learner contribution to interaction to one turn and may thus reduce learning opportunities. In this essay, we find that to make a good learning atmosphere for learning a new foreign language, the teachers need to act properly. A good teacher with excellent teaching skills can guide students to learn well, especially young learners who are still in fear of failure and are unlikely to keep studying when they fail. The teachers should have been trained on how to increase the confidence of the students and make them feel less afraid of the new language.

2.1.8. Meta-Analysis 8

The research by *Krashen (1981)* emphasizes the acquisition of a second language, specifically on how first language learning negatively affects the learning progress of a second language. He points out that although it had been presumed for a

long time that the only major source of syntactic errors in adult second language performance was the performer's first language (Lado, 1957), further researches refute this statement. It reveals that many grammar mistakes cannot be attributed to the first language but are owed by learners with different language backgrounds. After complex analysis, it turns out that the use of the mother language happens when the speaker has to produce in the target language but has not acquired enough knowledge to do so. Therefore, first language influence may imply low acquisition. This is supported by other relative research, who showed less first language influence with more proficiency (Taylor, 1975). In terms of the second foreign language, we could assume that mistakes should not always be attributed to the first or second language. It manifests less proficiency in this language. If so, it can be eliminated or at least reduced by natural intake and language use. The increasing practice would slowly get rid of the effect of the mother language.

2.2. Quantitative & Qualitative Methods

Quantitative research involves collecting numerical data and information that can be quantified and analyzed using statistical techniques. It is commonly used to test hypotheses, measure variables, and establish relationships between variables. I would conduct this research method by creating an online questionnaire and receiving corresponding results. On the other hand, qualitative research involves collecting non-numerical data and focusing on understanding the underlying meanings, perspectives, and experiences of individuals or groups. It is particularly useful when studying subjective experiences, cultural practices, and social interactions. I would carry out this research method by holding personal interview to acquire specific answers. Based on their features and ways of collecting data, this research applies both methods in order to receive the best result.

The goal of this research was to collect survey responses from students in the Guangdong Country Garden School AP program and receive detailed information about second foreign language learning. In this research, the second foreign language is defined as the language the students have learned after the study of their mother language (mainly Chinese) and their first foreign language (mainly English). Thus, the survey consists of two parts: questionnaires, questions, and interviews. In the first part, participants would finish the questionnaire, which consisted of seven multiple-choice questions. Although more than 60 people responded, not all surveys were usable, only 50 of them are selected for the research. Meanwhile, ten students took part in the interviews. Each student was asked about eight to twelve questions within fifteen minutes. Plus, they were told that the interviews were anonymous and their answers would be strictly kept confidential. The answers would only be used in this research but would have no other uses. All participants were aware of this information and agreed to have the interview. The interviews happened in an enclosed classroom, and a recording device was used as well. Moreover, during the interviews, there were no third parties and no interruptions.

3. Research Questions

- 1) How could a second foreign language affect high school students in their daily lives and future studies?
- 2) What are the students' attitudes about a second foreign language and its impact on the view of culture who have learned a second foreign language?
- 3) What factors would encourage the students to learn a second foreign language?

4. Results & Discussion

As for data obtained from questionnaires, in the research, I have acquired 61 data samples from the questionnaires, among them, eleven were invalid due to different reasons, including incomplete answers or other issues. I mainly gained this data by sending the questionnaires through social media platforms. Fifty of the questionnaires could be used in the research, which served as the base of my data. The responses mostly revealed participants' perspectives rather than their objective views. Here is a summary of the design intentions of the questions in the questionnaire.

Questions number 1 and 2 were meant to ask about the incentives for the participants to learn an SFL. According to the responses, almost 60% of the participants were driven by their self-interest, and the rest of them were asked to fulfill the requirements of the school. It means that the interest is an important initiative to access SFL. From question number 4, 70% of the learners show support to their friends about whether or not they should learn a SFL. In the remaining four questions, the following results were obtained: For the question of how an SFL helps students' overall learning, the answers lay in the aspects of "study," "social," and "no help," 75% of the participants believed that the second foreign language learning indeed helped their general learning. 70% of the responses showed that learning a second foreign language was helpful to English learning. 86% of participants expressed that by learning a second foreign language, they thought they had learned more about their target countries. About 82% of the participants held the idea that an SFL would help them gain new skills, and 76% of them thought that they could have more benefits in gaining job opportunities.

From the overall perspective, we could see that most second foreign language learners believed that an SFL was helpful since only 8% of people chose "an SFL is helpless." 62% of the participants thought that learning an SFL would benefit not only their "study aspect" and "English learning" to a different extent but also an SFL had increased their understanding of the culture of the country. Thus, we may deduce that learning an SFL language has marginal benefits, including helping academics, encouraging cultural understanding, and promoting students' English proficiency to some extent. Furthermore, the students who were requested to learn an SFL by the school have reflected good results in learning English as well. 80% of them pointed out that the SFL learning has improved their English learning. Based on these data, other schools could also have been encouraged, and they

could also have tried to set up SFL classes and ask for participants' feedback.

From the results that 60% of the learners are driven by interest to learn SFL, it means that the interest is an important initiative to access to SFL. The inner will to learn plays an important role in the success of the study. Since SFL is a hard subject to study, people can experience failures or difficulties that thwart their minds. Thus, they may give up learning it or discourage others from learning. However, the data from whether or encourage friends points out, significantly, that all of the participants driven by interest have chosen to show support to their friends to learn SFL. This means that after long and arduous study, the interest-driven students still have passion and love to learn, which enables them to advocate for others to learn. The inner incentive, compared to the outer force, greatly enhanced the persistence and enthusiasm in learning that are hard to achieve. When learning has less positive feedback, such as progress in studying, high grades on the assignment, and feeling well in the study, motivation in people's minds will differentiate who will proceed to the last. From the data, we could find that without a strong will, it is almost impossible to finish a long-term study.

As for data obtained from interviews, I have conducted 10 interviews, and the participants included four boys and six girls. The interviews are held in a silent classroom, and use recordings to store participants' answers. There were 8 to 12 questions in each interview, all completed in around 15 minutes. In all ten interviews, students have all shared positive opinions about learning an SFL. All the girls were intrigued to learn an SFL by wishing to learn about other cultures. However, boys started their learning mainly by parents or school requirements. It turns out that girls have a higher frequency of having class and a better level of learning. Seven of them have concluded that an SFL has indeed increased their skills in English due to reasons such as gaining interest in languages, adapting new language learning skills, and connecting the SFL with English.

For the cultural part, nine of them believed that their cultural knowledge was increased by viewing primitive books, watching videos, and even trying to communicate with the target language speakers. Meanwhile, all of them believed that their study ability increased as they spent time in learning a SFL. They have reflected that they became more confident and talkative, and they received better learning habits. The overall interview responses showed positive feedback about SFL learning.

5. Conclusion

In this research, some flaws needed to be improved. More information, data, and documents were needed to construct a better and clearer view of SFL learning. In some further study, I would like to expand my database to at least 100 questionnaires and 20 more interviews to present more data. Meanwhile, comparing my essay with others in the same field it could be more likely for me to find out how my essay can fill the gaps in the knowledge of the discipline. Also, some parts of my essay blocked me since I have not been proficient enough in utilizing the

methods and skills in essay writing. In the future, I would assess my ability precisely and spare a few weeks or months to make my timetable more flexible.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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