A Case Study: Exploring the English Language Learning Environment at Junyi School of Innovation

*A Capstone Paper in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in Leadership and Learning in Organizations
Peabody College of Vanderbilt University*

Evelyn Chen

Acknowledgements and Dedications

To my friends and colleagues at Taipei American School: Thank you for making it possible for me to pursue this program. You made considerations of my teaching load and shifted my classes so that I could attend the morning Vanderbilt live sessions. Some of you took on more responsibilities so I could be both a teacher and a student. Thank you.

To the English teachers at Junyi School of Innovation: This capstone project would not have been possible without your support. Thank you for your warm hospitality and granting me full access to your campus, students, and faculty members. It is inspiring to see the way that you care for your curricular programs and your students' progress and wellbeing. I am honored to get to know your school community.

To Michael Neel and my LLO Cohort: Thank you for your unwavering determination that we cross the finish line together. You helped shape my half-baked ideas and checked in when times were tough. I never imagined that a community of friends and colleagues could be formed online, but I am grateful that we are connected through this shared experience.

To Mom, Dad, and Trey: Thank you for your love, support and guidance along this journey. You gave me the encouragement I needed to stay focused. From providing lunchboxes when I was too busy to make meals, letting me vent my frustrations, and making sure I took time for self-care, your steadfast presence motivated me to keep going.

Thank you, my village of friends, colleagues and family. I am proud to make you proud.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Junyi School of Innovation is a private school serving students in the 1st through 12th grade in Taitung, a small city of approximately 230,000 on Taiwan's southeast coast facing the Pacific Ocean. Since its founding in 2008, Junyi has strived for its students to pursue a positive and fulfilling life through programs designed to nurture talents, build bilingual communication skills, and foster sound character traits. Junyi boasts a robust English curricular program, which makes the school stand out from the other public and private schools in the Taitung area. Students are in English class 4 – 7 hours a week, and some students have a native English speaker as a homeroom teacher. Junyi is particularly proud that a significant number of the student and faculty community who identify themselves as Taiwanese aborigines, relative to national averages.

The demographics of the school that include a large aborigine and rural population make Junyi unique relative to the typical Taiwanese public school, and these populations add valuable elements to the school culture and community ethos. Since its founding in 2011, Junyi has charged itself with ambitious plans – to foster English fluency in their students to help them connect with other cultures and cultivate new career opportunities. Junyi envisions graduating students with excellent English proficiency levels. Still, their external testing results show their students are currently underperforming on standardized examinations of English proficiency relative to the national average.

In 2018 – 2020, more than half of the Junyi students scored below average on the Taiwan General Scholastic Ability Test (GSAT), and in 2019, almost 90% of students scored in the 'Basic' and 'To Be Strengthened' range of English proficiency on the Comprehensive Assessment Program (CAP) assessment. Although 11 of 69 graduates in the 2018-2020 graduating classes have met the school's goal of supporting students to study abroad, the large majority of students are not meeting expectations in this area. The school wants to

understand the factors that contribute to its ability to develop English fluency for their students.

The challenge of developing English fluency has led me to explore the experience of learning English at Junyi using Stake's (1995) qualitative case study approach. This methodology emphasizes a holistic understanding of a phenomenon within real-life contexts from those involved – the students and teachers at Junyi. Furthermore, I hoped a case study approach could deepen an understanding of Junyi student performance in English language learning beyond external assessments alone. By exploring this case, I intend to inform evidence-based recommendations for improving the English language learning environment at Junyi and reporting means to assess English language proficiency improving Junyi's perception of student ability.

The case study focuses on two broad research questions:

1. What are Junyi's students' and teachers' perceptions of English language learning at Junyi?

2. What elements outside Junyi School affect English language learning at Junyi?

To investigate these questions, I drew on a range of data to explore students' and teachers' perceptions about the Junyi student experiences and teacher perceptions related to English language learning. I collected data to inform my investigation that included the following:

- I had many conversations with the Vice Principal.

- I reviewed the school's 2018 – 2020 external assessment scores.

- I reviewed the internal documentation related to English language learning and assessment.

- I visited the campus and observed a variety of grade 9 – 12 English classes, including a grade 11 and 12 Combined Studies class.

- I conducted semi-structured focus groups with seventeen grade 9 – 11 students.

- I conducted semi-structured interviews with five of Junyi's English teachers.

I engaged in the process of analysis that began with thematically coding interviews, as it aligned with my research questions. Then I triangulated by corroborating student and teacher narratives with the other data I collected related to English language learning at Junyi. As I tested preliminary findings against the data, I returned to the literature on English language learning and identified MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) willingness to communicate as a helpful frame for understanding this case in light of broader descriptions of English language learning.

Finding 1: Students at Junyi describe themselves as motivated to learn English. They point to feeling relationally connected with their English teachers and classmates as a primary motivating factor.

Students at Junyi report feeling relationally connected with their English teachers. For many, their relationships with their English teachers are a tremendous source of confidence and motivation to take on the challenges of learning English as a second language. Furthermore, students are motivated by their classmates' encouraging support. Experiences that cultivate peer relationships are memorable to students because they describe being motivated by experiences that celebrate collective, not individual, successes. The close relationships students establish with their peers and teachers are characteristics of high-quality learning environments because it minimizes anxiety, feelings of nervousness and tension, which negatively impacts learning (Syrja, 2011; Teimouri et al., 2019).

Furthermore, fostering close student-teacher relationships creates opportunities where students are willing to communicate. It generates students' desire to communicate with a specific person – their teacher, for example. This element of Junyi's learning environment aligns with MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) concept of willingness to communicate. At Junyi,

students are encouraged to communicate in a second language and are motivated to talk to others in a second language. This demonstrates that the Junyi English classes cultivate a learning environment that nurtures authentic communication in a second language.

Finding 2: Students have fun learning English at Junyi. Teachers aim to make English class fun, which they perceive is achieved when the curricular content is relatable to students.

Students at Junyi enjoy learning English because the class activities are varied, creative, and relatable. From playing Kahoot games where friendly competition drives students to showcase their best abilities to performing theatrical plays as a class, students find English classes memorable. The collective positive classroom experiences encourage students to participate in English class and deepen their motivation to participate in English class.

Teachers at Junyi constantly look for ways to make English relatable because they believe students participate more when the content matter appeals to them. Teachers described, at length, the positive energy that arises when students are engaged and attentive to the class activities. Furthermore, when the class activities align with student interests, it piques other's interest and raises additional conversational exchanges.

When students perceive class activities to be fun and engaging, it amplifies their willingness to communicate in a second language. This is supported by Khajavy, MacIntyre and Barabadi's (2018) study, who suggests that learners who are enjoying their learning experiences are more willing to communicate. Students' shared positive perceptions of a classroom environment enhances their WTC (Khajavy et al., 2018). Creating learning environments that generate positive affect is crucial to enhancing students' willingness to communicate, and this is vital for authentic English communication. It is phenomenal that

students at Junyi enjoy their English class, because it indicates that the learning environment provides the means for substantive learning.

Finding 3: Students perceive the English language as a means of connecting to a world outside of Taiwan.

Students at Junyi are motivated to learn English because they perceive the English language as a bridge to the world outside Taiwan. They are drawn to experiences that widen their perspectives. Some referenced past experiences that did just that and described it as a pinnacle moment that sparked their motivations to improve their English abilities. Others discussed the interests that compelled them to learn English outside of the classroom, such as learning to understand the lyrics to their favorite American music artists or watching varied YouTube content. Junyi students are eager to have experiences that connect with others outside of Taiwan. It is apparent that students at Junyi are open to and are interested in international affairs. This readiness to have intercultural experiences predicts motivation, which significantly predicts self-confidence, which results in WTC in the second language (Yashima et al., 2014).

Recommendation 1. Attend to the size of English classes to preserve the student experience that affords students' willingness to communicate.

Junyi needs to preserve the learning environments that engender students' willingness to seek out communication opportunities and bring out a willingness to communicate in English. One way of doing this is attending to the size of English classes. Smaller class sizes will promote close peer relationships and student-teacher relationships, which will encourage confidence and motivate students to communicate with one another in English authentically.

Recommendation 2. Identify supplementary ways to assess student learning in English to measure student progress.

The problems of assessing English proficiency solely based on external assessment scores are well documented in the scholarly literature (Menken, 2006; Solórzano, 2008; Pray, 2005). To diversify the assessment tools, Junyi can consider a range of outcomes that indicate achievement and progress in English language proficiency. For example, Junyi could track students' progress over time and determine to what extent they progress from one level to the next. Junyi could also implement their own English proficiency assessments at the beginning and end of each school year and include essential communicative elements not currently measured by the national examination. Questionnaires with a Likert scale could provide meaningful information on students' motivation in English language learning. This range of internal data would allow the school to determine their students' development of English fluency and orientation toward the English language across an academic calendar year and their tenure as a student at Junyi.

Recommendation 3. Identify opportunities for students to practice the practices of standardized test-taking without reducing the WTC emphasis of Junyi's English program.

Junyi's English program's strength resides in its rich, dynamic learning environments that cultivate students' willingness to communicate. Students' close relationships with their peers and teachers foster the motivation and confidence that supports their desire to communicate in English. The English teachers at Junyi should work proactively to preserve these characteristics of the learning environment while they also identify opportunities for students to practice the practices of test-taking. Changing the format and language of students' unit tests and homework assignments may better equip students to take external exams.

Introduction

Junyi School of Innovation is a private school serving approximately 400 students, from 1st through 12th grade. Located in the rural township of Taitung on the southeast coast of Taiwan, Junyi strives to have its students build bilingual communication skills. The school is proud to offer a robust English curricular program and hire native English-speaking teachers and international interns to increase students' access to English language learning opportunities. Conversations with the vice principal indicate that, despite the dynamic English program offerings, the students at Junyi are underperforming on their English proficiency external assessments relative to national averages. The school wants to understand the factors that contribute to its ability to develop English fluency.

This challenge allowed us to analyze the experience of learning English at Junyi using Stake's (1995) qualitative case study approach. Semi-structured student focus group interviews and teacher interviews offered a means of understanding the topic from their perspective in a local context – the school community of Junyi. It also granted me culturally specific information and the social context of Junyi. Conducting a case study helped us interpret and better understand the complex reality of a given situation. It allowed us to describe students' perceptions of English and their experiences learning English at Junyi.

The project provides recommendations that address the central question of - *"Why are Junyi's students' observed English proficiency considerably lower than the national average?"* This question assumes that students' external assessment scores are a good indicator of their English language fluency. By exploring this case in depth, I intend to provide recommendations for improving students' English proficiency external scores - without losing the strengths of the Junyi English program.

Organization

The organizational context for the quality improvement project is the Junyi School of Innovation, located in Taitung city, Taiwan. Junyi School of Innovation is a private school serving just under four hundred 1st through 12th-grade students in Taitung, a small town of approximately 230,000 on Taiwan's southeast coast. The Junyi campus has dormitory facilities for boarding over half of its students, and the school boasts an extensive outdoor education and English language learning program. The school campus also features a beautiful performing arts center. The school attracts students from all over the island – from large cities like Taipei and Tainan to the rural areas of Hualien, from the aboriginal reservations of Taitung to the small volcanic islands of Green Island and Orchid Island. Junyi's school community is proud to be comprised of such a diverse group of students. There is a significant number of aboriginals in the Junyi student and faculty community. This is one element that makes the Junyi community unique from the other schools in Taiwan. Of the 383 students enrolled and 70 teachers hired at Junyi, 86 students and ten faculty members are self-identified aborigines. Approximately 28% and 25% of the middle and high school students are aborigines, respectively. Many students are from the Amis, Bunan, Payuan, Yami, and Puyuma tribes, and few students are from the Truku, Drekay, and Atayal groups.

Junyi has the strong support of the Alliance Cultural Foundation, a philanthropic group in Taiwan that aims to build sustainable development in Taiwan's remote Hualien and Taitung regions. Over a hundred middle and high school students receive scholarship aid from Alliance, which is equivalent to approximately one-third of its student body. Only seven student recipients are not aboriginal. On average, Junyi students who receive sponsorship from Alliance receive a 50% scholarship subsidy and are not liable to reimburse the funds. The foundation's generosities nurture a new generation of youth predominately from the aboriginal community, and Junyi includes many such students.

High Student Turnover at Junyi

Junyi's vice principal, Mr. Anthony Cluver, who oversees the International Department, explained that the school experiences a significant student turnover between their middle and high school. Over half of the grade 9 students finish their junior high school at Junyi and leave to attend a different high school. This is because students participate in the two-day national senior high school entrance exams and choose to enroll in a high school based on their scores. Many students will choose to enroll in a higher-ranked high school if their scores afford this opportunity. Aside from this, the root causes of student turnover vary widely. Some families wish for their kids to attend high school in Taipei, Taiwan's capital city, where academic and extracurricular opportunities are more extensive and rigorous. They believe it will better prepare them for the upcoming college entrance exams. Some students who boarded at Junyi choose to attend a high school closer to their home. Regardless of why a junior high school student at Junyi chooses to attend a different high school, the decision-making process is heavily influenced by Confucian values – it is careful, deliberate, and involves many family members.

As a result, over half of Junyi's grade 10 students are new to the school. Cluver speaks of the challenges associated with cultivating a unifying Junyi school community and culture, when the composition of the student body varies so dramatically between 9th and 10th grade. He casually shrugs it off. It's one of the many challenges of being a school administrator of a new, private school that believes that educating the whole child goes beyond test scores. The project offers Junyi's school administrators and Alliance Foundation a chance to bolster one of their cornerstone curricular programs, perhaps as a means of decreasing the effects of student turnover and strengthening the continuity of their school culture.

Growing Influence of English Language in Taiwan's Schools

Junyi's aspirations to raise English proficiency among its students reflects Taiwan's aims for its entire population. In June 2020, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen announced that the government will soon launch the "2030 Bilingual Country Project" to make Taiwan a bilingual nation within 10 years (Everington, 2020). President Tsai hopes that by developing Taiwan's English fluency, there will no longer be a language barrier when Taiwanese citizens interact with people from other countries, fostering tourism and attracting foreign companies to invest in Taiwan. In the long term, the country's overall national competitiveness will improve (Financial Supervisory Commission Republic of China (Taiwan), 2019).

This lofty goal began in the early 2000s when the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) aimed to foster engagement with the international community; raising English-language competence was considered key to enhancing Taiwan's political and economic visibility (CEPD, 2002). In 2002, then-President Chen Shui-Bian suggested that Taiwan should adopt English as a second official language. The Council for Economic Planning and Development published *Challenge 2008,* a six-year national plan, which formally endorsed a call for 'English for all' – improving English proficiency for all, literally (CEPD, 2002). The DPP viewed improving English competence a necessity for Taiwan's integration into and gaining a competitive edge within the increasingly globalized networks and markets (Price, 2014). Through *Challenge 2008*, street signs became bilingual and restaurant menus were anglicized (CEPD, 2002).

The administrators at Junyi wish to understand how to help their students become fluent in English. This is partly motivated because it aligns with the country's agenda and because Junyi's English language program is far more robust than the other schools in the area. Since the school devotes considerably more time and resources to this curricular program, understandably, they want to do it well. Their future success would be of serious

interest to their immediate school community and also interest other Taiwan schools wishing to achieve similar goals. Junyi's success story could be the beginning of many others.

Problem of Practice

Junyi is proud to employ full-time, native English-speaking teachers and offers a robust English curricular program, making the school stand out from other public and private schools in the Taitung area. Of the eight English teachers at Junyi, five are from the United States, and the remaining three teachers have all studied and lived overseas. One of the foreign English teachers also serves as a homeroom teacher. The vice principal is South African. The school makes an effort to create an international environment by hiring native-English speaking teachers and international interns who serve the community as teaching assistants and dorm monitors. The school is confident that students at Junyi hear more English on a daily basis than students in other nearby local high schools. Students at Junyi are encouraged to communicate in English.

Conversations with the vice principal, Mr. Anthony Cluver, indicate that despite Junyi's rich English language program, the English proficiency among its students as measured by external standardized examinations is below national averages. For example, on the Taiwan General Scholastic Ability Test (GSAT), the Taiwanese university entrance exam, more than half of the Junyi students score below the national average. In 2018, 2019, and 2020, 50%, 56.5%, and 60% of the students scored below average. Junyi also implements the Comprehensive Assessment Program (CAP) for Junior High School Students (中華民國國中教育會考), which includes an English reading and listening component. The students are given a score for each of these respective components and an overall English proficiency score. In 2019, fifty-seven Junyi students took this external exam, and almost 90% of its

students scored in the 'Basic' and 'To Be Strengthened' range of English proficiency. More detailed results can be referred to in Appendix A.

Furthermore, Junyi's English proficiency external scores among its aboriginal students are inconsistent with their non-aboriginal student counterparts, which is an area of concern for the Alliance Cultural Foundation. Of the 66 students who took the GSAT in 2018 – 2020, 17 students are aborigines. More aboriginal Junyi students scored below, rather than above, the national average on the GSAT in 2019. It's important to note that Taiwan does not disaggregate scores based on ethnicity or tribal affiliation, so government data is not available to compare between the aboriginal students at Junyi and aboriginal student populations or non-aboriginal counterparts.

Since most Junyi students who receive scholarship aid from the Alliance Cultural Foundation are aborigines, the leaders of Alliance and Junyi are particularly concerned with the lack of English proficiency in this subgroup. It is in the foundation's interest to better understand the plausible reasons that might explain the underperformance. The administration has limited understanding of why students are underperforming in external standardized assessments and the relationship that it may have to the English language learning environment at Junyi.

The project seeks to better understand both students' perceptions of English language learning, the teachers' perceptions of students learning English at Junyi, and any institutional elements that impact student's English language learning. Through exploration of these components, the project provides recommendations that address the central question of – "Why are Junyi's students' observed English proficiency considerably lower than the national average?" This central question is raised under the assumption that students' external assessment scores indicate their English language fluency.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

To address the underperformance on standardized assessments of English proficiency relative to the national average, I chose to first look at the English classroom environment because the classroom setting offers a shared learning experience among all high school Junyi students. Focusing on the English language learning environment would provide important insight into students' perspectives towards learning English. In this section, I will review the scholarly literature that answers the question: *What elements of a classroom environment support second language learning?*

A classroom learning environment that is conducive for language learning requires an environment where students are encouraged to speak regularly in the target language (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2019). Student participation in classroom contexts depends on the degree to which students are willing to speak in a second language (Peng, 2012). MacIntyre et al. (1998) conceptualized students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in second language (L2) learning environments, defining it as "a readiness to enter discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (p. 547).

Preparing students who are willing to speak in a second language is a fundamental goal of foreign language teaching (MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei & Noels, 1998). Emphasizing the spoken element of communication second language is supported by researchers MacIntyre and Charos (1996), who argue that one must talk to others in the target language to learn a second language because communicating directly with another human is the fundamental reason for language.

Willingness to communicate (WTC) was originally conceptualized as a stable personality trait that is relatively consistent across different various communication contexts (dyads, groups) to justify individual differences in communication in the first language (McCroskey and Baer, 1985 as cited in Zarrinabadi and Tanbakooei, 2016). One's trait-like

WTC referred to the inclination to open a conversation, for example. MacIntyre et al. (1998) applied this concept to second language (L2) learning environments. MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) pyramid-shape model, illustrated below in Figure #1, shows six layers - the range of influences on student's willingness to communicate in a second language.

Figure 1

Heuristic model of variables influencing willingness to communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1998)
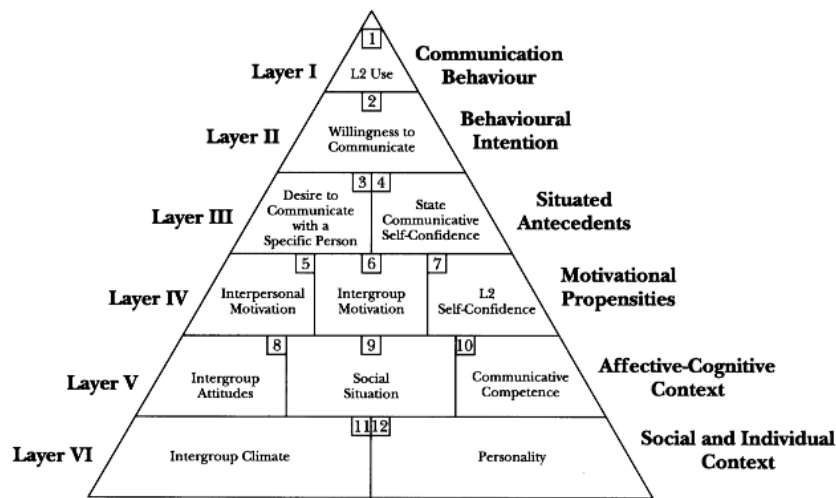
Moving from bottom to top, MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) demonstrate both the enduring factors (e.g., personality, intergroup climate, attitudes, and motivation) and transient, situation-specific contexts (desire to communicate with a specific person and self-confidence) that is perceived to influence L2 WTC. The top three layers, communication behavior, behavioral intention, and situated antecedents, refer to WTC's situational influences at any given moment in time. These situational influences are momentary and depend on the specific context perceived by an individual at a particular time. At the top of the pyramid, the situated influences, reflect the many, interacting internal and external processes that influence a person's use of the language they are learning. The bottom three layers, motivational propensities, affective-cognitive context, and social and individual context, are described as the long-term influences of the environment or person and cause an enduring influence on WTC.

MacIntyre et al. (1998) advocated for WTC as a means of talking to learn, arguing that "a program that fails to produce students who are willing to use the language is simply a failed program" (p. 547). By engendering students' willingness to seek communication opportunities and willingness to communicate in them, we might achieve the ultimate goal of language learning – authentic communication between persons of different languages and cultural backgrounds.

Such a learning environment requires an environment where students are not too self-conscious or embarrassed to take risks when they speak (Syrja, 2011). Fostering an environment where mistakes are accepted as part of the learning process, encourages students to learn and communicate in a new, second language (Syria, 2011). An existing body of research examines the relationship between situation-specific anxiety and second language achievement. Teimouri, Goetze, and Plonky's (2019) meta-analysis provide firm evidence that anxiety, the subjective feeling of tension, nervousness, and worry negatively inhibit second language learning and impact second language achievement. Anxiety accounts for approximately 13% of the variance in students' second language achievement on average, as measured by course grades, language tests, self-assessments, and GPAs (Teimouri et al., 2019). This demonstrates that language anxiety has a moderately detrimental effect on learning. Language learners experiencing anxiety are more inclined to underestimate their language proficiency and language competence (Teimouri et al., 2019). Creating a learning environment that minimizes anxiety supports second language learning because it will allow students to feel safe enough to address mistakes and try new things, whether it be pronouncing a new word or learning how to structure a sentence correctly.

Second language WTC research has since been widely conducted in various empirical studies. Quantitative methods utilize questionnaire surveys to examine the relationships between WTC and various variables, and research has demonstrated a correlation between

WTC and confidence (Peng & Woodrow, 2010), attitudes and motivation (Yashima, 2002), and personality (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996), just to name a few. Some qualitative studies highlight the situational contextual factors that affect L2 WTC (Kang, 2005; Cao & Philp, 2006). These studies highlight the significance of the classroom context.

Some research studies the variables affecting WTC among Chinese English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners. Liu and Jackson (2008) found that Chinese students' unwillingness to communicate is associated with language anxiety, self-perceived limited proficiency and access to English. Wen and Clement (2003) speculate that the Chinese Confucian heritage shape students' perceptions and behaviors in class. Peng and Woodrow (2010) found confidence served as the most significant predictor of WTC in Chinese EFL learners, and this finding is consistent with Yashima's (2002) study in Japan. Lin's (2019) recent study of Taiwanese EFL students validated the effect of affect, motivation, language competence, and communication anxiety on WTC. Although Lin's (2019) study includes 701 university students, participants are older than the students at Junyi, so the similarity in the cultural background makes the findings of particular interest to our project.

While understanding cultural influence on human behavior is undoubtedly of interest, cultural perspectives are not static and vary at the individual and group levels. Researchers have called on additional inquiry to avoid stereotyped assumptions and essentializing of language students of a particular nationality or cultural identity.

External assessments of English Language Ability

The problem of practice at Junyi, the underperformance on standardized examinations of English proficiency relative to the national average, indicates that Junyi measures its program's success based on their students' external scores. It made me question – to what extent do Taiwan's English external exams assess authentic communication in the second

language? What are the implications of using external test scores as the only means of evaluating learning environments?

Although these questions have not received much attention in Taiwanese scholarly literature on English language learning assessments, an existing body of research examines the issues and implications of high stakes testing for English language learnings in the United States. The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Legislation had sweeping effects across the nation, particularly for the nation's English language learners (ELL), initiating a movement to increase accountability in schools. The research that arose from this movement towards accountability shows that school curricula, programs, and instruction changed in response to the national testing emphasis (Menken, 2006). The pressures of accountability under NCLB drove teachers to focus ELL instruction on test content and skills – "teaching to the test," inevitably devoting class time to teaching test items and test-taking strategies (Menken, 2006). The majority of educators who participated in Menken's (2006) study attested to "teaching to the test," and this demonstrates that the practices of taking external exams are distinct from the practices involved in authentic communication in a second language (Reardon, 1990).

Furthermore, Solórzano (2008) argues that standardized tests cannot be assumed to be valid, reliable, and fair when the students differ from the "norming group" tested. If the test is normed with the dominant group, it is biased and unfair towards minoritized populations because their socialized and learning experiences differ. For instance, the SAT9 only included 1.8% ELL in its norming population, and yet 25% of the SAT9 test-takers in California were ELL students, thereby calling the validity of its normed results to question (Solórzano, 2008). If the external assessment's norming population is not representative of the testing population, likely, the inferences made about students' ability are not valid. Such findings suggest that the relative exam scores of any non-dominant group (e.g., aboriginal or

rural populations) may be problematic unless able to be disaggregated and analyzed independently.

Solórzano (2008) is also critical of standardized tests because of the absence of a common conceptual definition of English proficiency, thus giving rise to various proficiency tests. The six language proficiency tests analyzed in Zehler et al.'s (1994 as cited in Abedi, 2002) study found that "the tests differ considerably in types of tasks and specific item content. Even where two tests appear to require the same type of response and similar item content, the scoring criteria may focus on totally separate aspects of the response. As a result, the items are actually assessing totally different skills" (p. 8). Solórzano (2008) reasoned that external tests may not be a good predictor of students' actual English language proficiency.

Pray (2005) describes the problem with external tests of language proficiency in that it "fails to assess language used in naturally occurring contexts and has little to do with real life communication" (p. 389). Pray's (2005) study examines three commonly used English oral-language proficiency tests. The tests were given to native English-speaking students of varied socioeconomic backgrounds, and the native speakers did not perform well on these tests, calling the validity of the tests into question. If native speakers are labeled not proficient, then the test "prescribes what ability native speakers should have, instead of describing a child's linguistic ability" (Pray, 2005, p. 390). In other words, tests that identify native English speakers as having limited English proficiency cannot be trusted to assess the English ability in L2 students accurately.

The literature I reviewed in brief above further discusses the challenges associated with using language instruments to measure English language proficiency. There is compelling evidence that external tests are problematic in terms of assessment of English proficiency, especially amongst minoritized populations. External assessments are even more

of a blunt instrument if the primary goal of language learning is authentic communication in the second language.

Research Questions

This investigation was guided by the following questions:

RQ1: What are Junyi's students' and teachers' perceptions of learning English at Junyi?

RQ 2: What elements outside Junyi affect English language learning at Junyi?

Methods

For this research, I used a single case study design based on methodology described by Stake (1995). Stake (1995) views case as "a specific, complex functioning thing" more specifically "an integrated system" which "has a boundary and working parts" (p. 2). Given the focus of the problem identified at the outset of the study, I bounded the case at the English language classrooms at Junyi but also sought to attend to external elements that influenced student participation in those classrooms. One distinct aspect of Stake's case study methodology is that the conceptual framing is only tentative at the beginning of the study. Instead, the researcher articulates hunches and operative theories throughout and tests these while collecting and analyzing data over time. The conceptual framing and the analytical implications of the case, therefore, only become fixed in the final phases of analysis.

Data Collection

Qualitative case studies must consider the interrelationship between the phenomenon and its contexts, be based on field observations, and validate findings using triangulation strategies. I collected data, therefore, from a range of sources that could inform interpretation of the case.

External and Internal Documentation

In order to understand the context of Junyi's observed problem of practice, I collected the school's most recent external assessment scores. The school administration sent me the raw 2018, 2019, and 2020 General Scholastic Ability (GSAT) scores and the 2018, 2019 Comprehensive Assessment Program (CAP) scores. The raw scores included the yearly percentile ranking, which made it possible to understand how well the students at Junyi performed on these English proficiency exams relative to the national average.

The school also provided the 2020 and 2021 results of their grade 9 English proficiency test. When asked if the school could provide any internal data that shows the extent of their students' English fluency levels improving over time, the school offered me this source of internal data. However, this information was not used in this capstone project, because the Vice Principal was concerned that this information could not accurately portray the school's progress over time.

Classroom Observations

I visited the campus in late December 2020 and I observed a variety of grade 9 – 12 English classes. During the classroom observations, I typically sat in the back of the classroom and watched how the students interacted with one another, as well as how the students interacted with their teacher. I recorded careful observations of how students interacted with one another, how students interacted with their teachers, and how members of the class organized themselves in the physical space of the classrooms. I made note of how students, the teacher, and the learning materials were distributed in the physical space of the classroom. The intention was to understand the culture and context of the English class learning environments at Junyi. Notes were recorded first by paper and pen, and then analytical memos were written after each set of observations.

Student Focus Groups

The process of selecting student participants occurred out of convenience. Vice Principal Anthony Cluver sent out an email to Junyi's English teachers, stating the premise of the project and requested that they print out and distribute consent forms to their grade 9 – 12 English classes. Bilingual student consent forms, accompanied with parent letters, were sent home to all students and their families. Twenty-nine students completed the consent form, and nine students declined. The original data collection plan was to make many visits to Junyi through the fall semester of 2020, but visits were limited due to COVID-19 and scheduling difficulties. As a result, I was only allowed two days of campus visits at the end of December 2020 that included six distinct observations. In the limited time available, 17 of the 29 student participants were available to participate in a focus group interview.

Table 1

List of Focus Group Student Participants

Number	Grade Level	Gender	Age	Years at Junyi	Ethnicity	Native Language	Years of ELL
1	9	F	14	2 - 3 years	Han Chinese	Taiwanese, Chinese	6
2	9	F	14	2 - 3 years	Han Chinese	Taiwanese, Chinese	6
3	9	M	14	2 - 3 years	Han Chinese	Taiwanese, Chinese	14
4	9	M	15	2 - 3 years	Aborigine	Palawan	15
5	9	M	14	2 - 3 years	Han Chinese	Chinese	13
6	9	F	14	4 - 5 years	Han Chinese	Chinese	11
7	10	F	16	< 1 year	Han Chinese	Taiwanese, Chinese	12
8	10	M	16	2 - 3 years	Han Chinese	Chinese	7
9	10	F	16	2 - 3 years	Han Chinese	Taiwanese, Chinese	6
10	11	M	16	4 - 5 years	Han Chinese	Taiwanese, Chinese	10
11	11	F	16	2 - 3 years	Han Chinese	Taiwanese, Chinese	9
12	11	F	17	< 1 year	Han Chinese	Taiwanese, Chinese	11
13	11	F	16	2 - 3 years	Hakka	Hakka	9
14	11	F	16	4 - 5 years	Han Chinese	Chinese	11
15	11	F	17	2 - 3 years	Han Chinese	Taiwanese, Chinese	9
16	10	F	16	3 years	Aborigine	N/A	N/A
17	10	F	16	3 years	Aborigine	N/A	N/A

Table 2

Categorical Breakdown of Student Participants

Percent	
Male	**Female**
29.4	70.6%

Grade	Number	Percent
9	6	35.3%
10	5	29.4%
11	6	35.3%
12	0	0%

Years at Junyi	Number	Percent
< 1 year	2	11.8%
2 – 3 years	12	70.6%
4 – 5 years	3	17.6%

The focus group interviews, comprised of three or four students either occurred in the faculty conference room during their English class or after school in the dormitory facilities. The focus group protocol was designed to allow student participants to speak comfortably. For many, this was the first time they met me, and it was important that the focus group interviews were fun, relaxed, and open. By inviting students to participate in small groups of three or four, I had hoped to create an opportunity for students' responses to play off of one another. When a student listened to another's idea, it might compel them to respond by either building on what was previously said or sharing a contrasting idea. The focus group protocol was intended to solicit a wide variety of ideas from students.

When I introduced the purpose of the focus group to students, I stated the purpose of the study, explained my role as the facilitator, and emphasized that there were no wrong answers. The focus group conversations were intended to allow everyone a chance to share their perspective, even if it differed from what others had previously said. I intentionally explained these introductory ideas in both English and Mandarin to demonstrate my ability to communicate in both languages. Student participants were asked to state which language they

preferred to communicate with; all the students wanted to participate in English. During the course of the focus group interviews, some students had difficulty explaining their ideas in English, so they temporarily switched and spoke in Mandarin. However, it's important to note that all students tried to contribute to the focus group conversations in English.

Given the nature of the problem of practice, the semi-structured focus group questions were designed to solicit responses that answered to a general case study question, *What is it like learning English at Junyi?* A set of six focus group questions, as shown in Appendix B, were designed to explore students' perceptions of the English language and their experiences learning English at Junyi. Many follow-up questions were asked to deepen students' responses in an attempt to further understand students' perceptions of learning English at Junyi and what affects their participation in their English classes. The table below outlines how the student focus group questions related to the research questions.

Table 3

Student Focus Group Questions Correlate to Capstone Research Questions

Research Question	Student Focus Group Questions
#1. What are Junyi's students' and teachers' perceptions of English language learning at Junyi?	• How long have you been learning English? How long have you been a student at Junyi? • Describe what it's like for you to learn English here – at Junyi or more broadly, in Taiwan. • Can you describe a time when you enjoyed participating in classes that are taught in English? • Can you think back to a time when you did not want to participate in an English-speaking class?
#2. What elements outside Junyi School affect English Language learning at Junyi?	• Are you motivated to learn English? What motivates you to learn English? • Do you think it's important to speak English as native speakers?

I used Otter.ai to record and transcribe the focus groups and interviews; after each focus group interview, I wrote an analytical memo to note salient information I recognized at the time. Follow-up virtual interviews were scheduled with four student participants in

January 2021. Analytical memos were written after each focus group interview, which I used to identify the preliminary findings based on the student data.

Teacher Interviews

All eight of Junyi's English teachers agreed to participate. However, only five were available to be interviewed.

Table 4

List of Junyi Teacher Participants

Number	Gender	Years at Junyi	Years of ELL Teaching Experience	Native Language
1	M	5	20	English
2	M	3	5	English
3	M	1	6	English
4	F	9	19	Chinese
5	M	10	20	Chinese

The teacher interview protocol was designed with a similar intention – to allow participants to speak comfortably and openly about their experiences teaching English at Junyi (Kreuger, 2002). The interviews were conducted one-on-one in a closed room on campus to ensure anonymity (Brenner, 2006). Because the English teachers were all fluent in English, all the interviews were conducted in English. There was no concern that the ideas might be incorrectly interpreted. The interview questions, as shown in Appendix C, were designed to explore teachers' perceptions of students learning English at Junyi. The table below demonstrates how the teacher interview questions related to our research questions.

Table 5

Teacher Interview Questions Correlate with Capstone Research Questions

Research Question	Teacher Interview Questions
#1. What are Junyi's students' and teachers' perceptions of English language learning at Junyi?	• What motivates Junyi students to learn English? To improve their English proficiency? • When do students at Junyi enjoy participating in English class? • When do students at Junyi not participate in English class?
#2. What elements outside Junyi School affect English Language learning at Junyi?	• What internal and external factors impact Taiwanese students' participation in classes that are taught in English? • The school community at Junyi is very diverse. There are multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented in the student community. There are also socioeconomic differences among the student community. Are there any noticeable differences in students' engagement in learning English based on their ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds? • Do you notice any patterns about the way to which students interact with each another in your English class?

I was limited to convenience sampling for both faculty and student given the

constraints of the project and larger challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The

demographics and gender composition of the sample could not be controlled, because the

number of available participants were limited. The recruitment of students for focus groups

was limited to grade 9 – 12 students and teachers who teach English classes at Junyi, because

the English curriculum in the elementary and middle school years are considerably different.

Limited representation across relevant demographic categories and the low numbers of

participants limit the findings relative to a study that could have included all participants.

Although this sample is not an ideal reflection of the general population, I pursued all of the

relevant participants that were available to me.

Data Analysis

I began data analysis with Stakes' (1995) open-ended *'what's going on here?'* case study question in mind. I started first with the initial informational interviews with school leaders and the external assessment data, and I quickly recognized that the school leaders viewed its English program to be failing. They consistently referenced their students' low external standardized test scores, concerned that so many of their students were underperforming relative to the national average. From the beginning, it was evident that there was a strong perception of failure and considerable concern in how that would be interpreted by various stakeholders.

School External Assessment Data

I turned my attention to Junyi's external assessment data, as shown in Appendix A. The summary statistics helped to illustrate the extent to which students at Junyi underperformed, relative to the national average, on these external assessments. The summary of Junyi's external assessment data is disaggregated based on tribal affiliation. However, it's important to note that Taiwan does not disaggregate scores based on ethnicity or tribal affiliation, so government data is not available for comparison between Junyi's aboriginal students and other Taiwanese aboriginal students. It is impossible without extensive independent data collection, therefore, to know exactly what Junyi's external assessment scores mean relative to other like-Taiwanese students.

Classroom observations

The purpose of these classroom observations was to gather insight on the English language learning environment at Junyi and deepen my understanding of English language learning situation beyond the standardized test results. I drew on my observation notes that attended to how students interacted with one another, how students interacted with their teachers, and how members of the class organized themselves in the physical space of the

classrooms in order to write an authentic account of what it is like to learn English at Junyi. I also drew on analytical memos that I wrote after these classroom visits, which also guided my early approach to the data analysis. As I will describe later in the findings, I found that the classrooms I observed were not marked by failure and I built on this emerging tension in my analytical process as I turned to the student focus groups and teacher interviews.

Student Focus Groups

During the first pass through the student transcripts, I thematically categorized student answers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) based on students' perceptions of failure and perceptions of success in learning English. Broadly categorizing student answers within these two categories allowed me to identify sub-categories based on the common themes in their answers. I identified perception of success themes that emerged consistently in the student data: (1) students feel relationally connected with their teacher (2) students thrive from positive peer relationships (3) English classes are fun and engaging (4) students perceive English as a tool to establish global connections with others. The only perception of failure theme I identified were references to limitations in peer relationships and unwillingness to participate in class that was related to large class sizes. I wrote analytical memos that identified the preliminary findings based on the student data (Stake, 1995).

Teacher Interviews

I initially treated the student focus group data and teacher interview data as separate sets of data that required independent findings, before I looked across the two groups of interviewees to test preliminary findings and arrive at wholistic findings (Merriam, 1998).

During the first pass through the teacher transcripts, I tried analyzing the teacher data with a similar approach as I had with the student data, beginning with broad questions and exploring their responses (Brenner, 2006). However, this method of analysis was not effective, because the data was not as substantive as the student data had been. The teacher

interviews proceeded in a range of directions and at the time of interviewing I had a difficult time keeping the teachers focused on the areas I was most interested in exploring. Teacher responses, at times, drifted off-topic and onto tangential ideas, and I felt uncomfortable interrupting their train of thought and redirecting the conversation. In addition, most of the teachers' time made available for the interview was limited and interviews were shorter than I had hoped. These reasons, coupled with the small sample of five teachers, my analysis did not have the strength of thematic continuity exhibited in the student data. In an ideal world, I would have conducted additional follow-up interviews with the teacher participants and collected data from the three additional three English teachers at Junyi.

As a result, I thematically categorized the teacher data based on the answers to the questions I asked the teachers. For example, when I asked the teachers, "What motivates Junyi students to learn English? To improve their English proficiency?" I grouped the responses from all available teacher participants. Then, I created thematic categories from their answers. The teacher responses were utilized as a secondary source – to test the preliminary findings drawn from the student data. Did the teachers' responses corroborate the findings from the student data? Did teachers offer perspectives that added to or challenged what the students' perspectives?

Analysis for Conceptual Connection

As I recognized consistent findings across the data sources and worked to corroborate the findings, I began to ask the question - *How do I understand English language learning at Junyi in light of the broader literature on English language learning environments and assessment?*

I initially turned to the literature that spoke to learning environments that optimize second language learning in a foreign country. Many sources referenced MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) as a conceptualization of

success/failure in language learning that went beyond straightforward technocratic measures. When I recognized that this conceptual framework would help me understand this case as something other than a case of failure in English language learning, I returned to the data in light of language learning environments that I had observed and heard about from students and teachers.

As the application of a WTC framework brought complexity to the success-failure dichotomy I encountered related to standardized assessments, I turned to the literature that discussed the implications of high-stakes testing on language learning environments (Menken, 2006; Solórzano, 2008; Pray, 2005). There was a wealth of scholarly literature that discussed the challenges associated with using external assessments to accurately assess language learning and communication in the second language. I returned to the data in light of these challenges and sought to understand what were Junyi's next steps in an effort to help direct their efforts of improving students' English fluency.

Findings and Discussion

The administrators of Junyi School of Innovation perceive the school as a struggling institution, shadowed by its students' low English proficiency external assessment scores. When we began this capstone project, the problem of practice suggested that exploring students' perceptions of learning English and observing classroom interactions would shed light on some insufficiencies. However, the data gathered in the students' focus group and faculty interviews suggest a very different narrative – Junyi is offering a rich, quality English language learning experience to all of its students. In this case study, we will first answer the two research questions, then we will discuss the misalignment between the school's external assessment scores and the students' experiencing of learning English at Junyi.

Research Question 1: What are Junyi's students' and teachers' perceptions of English language learning at Junyi?

Junyi student participants unanimously agree that the learning environment at Junyi fosters a lively, engaging space for learning English. Every interviewed student described a love for learning English. For some, this love stemmed from their close relationship with their English teacher, and for others, their interest for learning English arose from their positive interactions with their peers. Teachers, for their part, perceive their students as dynamic, motivated learners, who are driven by the support of their classmates, and moved to learn English when it aligns with their interests. The teachers perceive that they need to make English relatable, such as allowing students to choose an animal to present in English, because students are more engaged when they can make a personal connection to the content material.

Three primary themes emerge from the data that help answer the research question: close relationships, fun engaging class activities, and supportive peer relationships.

Students and Teachers Report Close Relationships that Elicits Authentic Communication

Students at Junyi report feeling relationally connected with their English teachers, and for many, a meaningful student-teacher relationship is a tremendous source of confidence and motivation to take on the challenges of learning a second language. Many students were eager in the focus groups to share the support they've received from their teacher.

For example, a grade 10 student described her teacher at Junyi as "patient and encourages [her] to talk." She said that if her teacher noticed her being silent in class, the teacher would come by and coax her to talk and share her ideas. The student reflected upon her relationship with the teacher as one "that influenced me a lot. I started to feel she cared about me and my improving of the English, so I started to change and talk more in class. That made me improve a lot."

33

Students at Junyi feel safe with their teachers to ask the silliest of questions, an act that most shy, easily embarrassed students would not dare. One Grade 9 student spoke of the challenges of understanding the humor in English Memes, explaining that while she knows the Meme is supposed to be funny, she doesn't get it. She shared that "we can ask them (teachers) and they will open their hearts and tell us the funny point." Students report being excited to partake in elements of modern Western, pop culture, but they don't always understand the subtle nuances. They lean on their close relationships with teachers to make these connections. This sense of security is what gives students a vote a confidence.

A grade 11 student of Hakka descent remembers what it was like studying English at her previous school, over three years ago. She refrained from speaking in English, even in English class, because "if I say something wrong in the teacher may scold of me or like they make me write down these words for many times." Fortunately, at Junyi, mistakes are not met with a penalty or punishment. In fact, her current English teacher at Junyi will openly correct her pronunciation, and she is grateful "for the chance to pronounce words correctly…it makes me have some confidence to speak English." The student admitted that it took almost a whole school year to feel comfortable speaking and participating in English class, in the way she does now.

Most of the students specifically referenced the positive impact their English teachers at Junyi have had on their experience of learning English, so it's not surprising that the teachers at Junyi also express their strong desire to establish meaningful relationships with their students. They are sympathetic to the challenges associated with learning a second language in Taiwan, particularly because students rarely have the opportunity to practice English outside of school. Teachers understand the fear and anxiety that comes from trying new things - pronouncing words in English, speaking in front of others in class. Furthermore, students who excel in other subjects may find themselves struggling to do well in English

class. To mitigate all of this, one of the most experienced teachers at Junyi, who has served the school community for 9 years, prioritizes her relationships with students above all else. In her words, with "a good relationship with all of my students, it can ease the nervousness and ease the fear of getting to know this language." Fostering a good rapport with her students opens up the opportunity for students to approach her for additional help. She makes herself available after school and she frequently help students who are looking to improve their reading or vocabulary skills. As these students demonstrate significant strides of growth, their confidence and motivation soars, removing barriers that might impede their participation in English class.

Having both native English-speaking and local Taiwanese English language teachers at Junyi is a tremendous asset, because it gives students a variety of individuals to connect with. This finding arises from students' positive affirmation of their teachers. Some students are drawn to native English-speaking teachers, because the students have a chance to ask them about their past experiences growing up in the United States. A student in grade 11 aspires to study abroad, and for her, this vision is not out of her grasp, because she has a teacher who inspires her with an international perspective. On the other hand, some students indicate an ease in establishing a close relationship with their Taiwanese English language teacher. This is particularly important to students who began at Junyi with what they perceived as low English proficiency levels and found it intimidating to be fully immersed in English. Students at Junyi see the positive of having native English-speaking and local Taiwanese English language teachers. Although in different ways, both sets of English teachers foster close relationships with students. Through these connections, students at Junyi love learning English and have a positive perception towards learning English.

It is clear from the student interviews that they feel seen, supported, and understood by their teachers. Students feel safe to ask their teachers questions and make mistakes in front

of others. Participants described positive student-teacher relationships that cultivates an English class culture where all participating members view themselves as a work in progress. Because students feel so close with their teachers, the interviewed students are not anxious about learning English and using this second language. A review of the scholarly literature on English language learning environments strongly affirms the importance of minimizing anxiety so that students' feelings of nervousness and tension do not negatively impact learning (Syrja, 2011; Teimouri et al., 2019). Furthermore, fostering close student-teacher relationships creates opportunities where students are willing to communicate. It generates students' desire to communicate with a specific person – their teacher, for example. This element of Junyi's learning environment aligns with MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) concept of willingness to communicate. At Junyi, students are not only encouraged to communicate in a second language, but students are motivated to talk to others in a second language. This demonstrates that the Junyi English classes cultivate a learning environment that nurtures authentic communication in a second language.

Fun, Engaging Class Activities Predominate English Class

When asked "*What is it like learning English at Junyi?"* four students, in different focus groups, emphatically exclaimed, "fun!" Students at Junyi love the games, activities, and all the creative ways of making English relatable and engaging. Thanks to the English teachers at Junyi, who all work hard to make English not just another academic subject, but a language that connects and brings people together, students at Junyi genuinely love learning English. While there are times that students need to endure a difficult grammar lesson or a mundane grade 9 English exam preparatory lesson, students find the projects and group activities in English class really memorable. Anecdotal evidence such as this makes us question the value of exam preparatory classes, particularly when English classes that do not have this focus have a great impact on student learning and experience.

One student referred to their English class as a venue to show themselves. "Sometimes we create our own songs, videos, or something like that. If I write a song on my guitar, I can bring my guitar to class and show it. This is good. Helps my interested in learning English." Another student performed his poem in English, which comedically references a first date gone wrong. The limelight was warm and welcoming, as his peers laughed at all the right places, and the student spoke of how this experience boosted his confidence to participate in English class.

A grade 11 student fondly remembered her English class at Junyi last year. The class was tasked to put together a Shakespeare play. "It was fun because everyone has a line to read, and everyone has to act." She was particularly drawn to the collective nature of this class assignment. Since this was the same student who earlier confessed that she was too shy to speak English at her previous school, hearing her gleefully describe her experience performing a part in the Shakespearian play was remarkable. Her focus was not on who had the most lines, or who was the most talented actor; she remembered that it was an experience that the class shared together. Experiences like this bring the class together, strengthening peer relationships that are crucial to a positive classroom experience.

Students reported that the fun games, activities, and performances deepen their motivation to participate in English class. They described themselves as being eager to contribute to class discussions, answer teacher-directed questions, and even perform an original poem. Through their shared positive experiences, students have established new ways of connecting to one another – all in English.

The findings clearly demonstrate that when students perceive class activities to be fun and engaging, it amplifies their willingness to communicate in a second language. This is supported by Khajavy, MacIntyre, and Barabadi's (2018) study, which suggests that learners who are enjoying their learning experiences are more willing to communicate. Students'

shared positive perceptions of a classroom environment enhance their WTC (Khajavy et al., 2018). Furthermore, students with positive attitudes and strong motivations are likely to develop better language competence and confidence (Lin, 2019). Creating learning environments that generate positive affect is crucial to enhancing students' willingness to communicate, and this is vital for authentic English communication. It is phenomenal that students at Junyi love their English class and find their class fun because it indicates that the learning environment provides the means for substantive learning.

English Language Learning at Junyi Aligns with Student Interest

Although students were most excited to share memorable class activities – activities that boosted their confidence, that generated a collective class experience, teachers believe that students are most eager to participate in English class when the content matter directly aligns with students' interests. Teachers strive to make English class approachable – often leveraging what they know about their students' interest outside of class and weaving it into their class activities.

As one described, teachers know when they've locked in on a "key idea" when their students are noticeably more excited, raising hands, speaking aloud, and engaging in dialogue with their classmates. "The energy is just really high," casually referencing the increased student interest when the class had the opportunity to learn about mammoths. According to the teacher, students in the class spontaneously asked to learn more about this animal, referencing their prior knowledge from the movie *Ice Age*. They asked the teacher, "Did mammoths really like communicate with sloths or humans? And we got into that discussion." The teacher was more than willing to immediately change his lesson plan to accommodate student interest, noting "I thought that was pretty cool."

When English classes align with student interest, teachers believe that their students are engaged and attentive to the task at hand, and their focus and interaction with one another

pushes the discussion forward. I observed this first-hand in a Grade 11/12 Global Studies class. Students were tasked to investigate significant political events. I sat for a while with a student group where a student was particularly interested in learning about the efforts to overthrow the Nazi German government and how political events led to a significant change in government. He led others in conducting online research and asked questions that encouraged his peers to respond. This student had a positive influence on his peers, because it raised the interest of others and increased peer exchanges. The group discussion was lively. Although much of the student group conversation occurred in Mandarin, they worked together to eventually answer the teacher's guiding questions in English. The teacher successfully created an opportunity for this group of students to delve into their interests and used it to further their English language abilities.

Influence of peer relationships

The fun, engaging activities in English class cultivate close, supportive peer relationships in class. Students construct knowledge through interactions in class, and they recognize how important it is to be around peers who they feel comfortable asking questions and having discussions with.

None of the interviewed students spoke of negative peer experiences in English class at Junyi. In fact, six of the seventeen student participants spoke of positive interactions with their classmates. Remarks ranged from simply referencing a classmate in a positive anecdote to describing how they asked for help from a classmate during class. One student explained that they choose to sit next to a specific someone because they are at similar levels and it makes them comfortable occasionally mispronouncing words. Another student enthusiastically expressed the joy they experience anytime they can engage in teamwork in English class, whether it is creating a video animation or playing a Kahoot game.

Students at Junyi lean on one another in English class, and the students share in the joy of one another's accomplishments. A grade 11 student described how poor their English was when he first arrived at Junyi, and he was visibly proud when a classmate pointed out that now he is answering my interview questions in English. I was moved to witness such an organic interaction between peers and noted that it served to demonstrate a broader reality reported by students and teachers at Junyi. It showed that if students make improvements in English class, they are genuinely happy for one another. The impact of this social bond is remarkable at bolstering student confidence and motivation.

Teachers also recognize the impact of peer influence – "peer influence is one of the biggest if not the biggest factor." One teacher depicted the power of peer interactions, recalling the ways his advanced students helped out those who just entered that level of English class. His native English-speaking students offered help without being pushy – *we say it like this… I spell it like this…* These interactions not only helped to create a sense of belonging and community, but it boosted the class's attention and engagement with the subject matter. When students care more than just about their individual success, but about the success of others, it raises the motivation and confidence in everyone involved.

Another teacher recalled a student last year who was not academically strong, but he had a strong oratory voice and stood out as an excellent performer in the class portrayal of a Shakespeare play. The teacher believed that he grew confident because he was not only able to showcase his strengths in front of others, but he was surrounded by classmates who provided a lot of encouragement. His peers gave him positive feedback and helped him pronounce difficult words correctly. The teacher found it so rewarding to have observed such a noticeable growth in this student. He continued explaining that this same student was giving a presentation earlier this year, and unfortunately, another student embarrassed him by laughing at his pronunciation. The student, who last year made such large strides in English

class, has since this year "participated very little, in terms of open conversation and speaking." The teacher observed these changes in student behavior and attributed them to the influence of peers. Positive peer interactions can boost student's sense of self-efficacy, and negative peer interactions can hinder and disrupt student growth.

Although none of the student focus groups reported this phenomenon, teachers have depicted anecdotal evidence that demonstrate how detrimental it is on students' participation in English class when peer relationships are disrupted.

The data also suggests that if the class is not conducive to cultivating these peer relationships, it may hinder participation in English class. Multiple high school students mentioned that the size of their English class has dramatically increased from last year, and this has negatively impacted their motivation to answer questions aloud in class. Two grade 10 students explained that because the English "class is too big," they both choose to stay quiet, because they "assume others will have better answers… when compare to native speakers, my English is not good." Their feedback indicates that students naturally compare their proficiency level with those around them, and when they are aware of their own shortcomings, they feel hesitant, sometimes afraid. As a result, they prefer to stay quiet in English class, which eliminates an opportunity to work on areas that need improvement.

A grade 11 student reasoned that because the class size is bigger, "it's hard for the teacher to prepare something that everyone do together. Some students are doing other things in the back." When probed how it made her feel, the student described feeling less connected with her whole class. She explains that although she has a few good friends in class, she missed how close her English class felt last year. It is less likely to successfully cultivate a feeling of collectiveness when, in large classes, activities don't necessarily encourage every student to participate and collaborate with one another. Students' responses show the

importance of creating a learning environment that cultivates supportive peer relationships, because it generates positive affect that is shared by the entire class community.

Students and teachers both overwhelming describe the impact that emotions have on learning, a relationship that research on language learning suggests correlates to deeper learning. As explained by Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007), "the physiology of emotion and its consequent process of feeling have enormous repercussions for the way we learn and for the way we consolidate and access knowledge," (p. 9). The English program at Junyi has demonstrated that its rich, dynamic curricular program cultivates close peer relationships that make students feel safe and supported in taking chances, from trying to pronounce difficult words to performing memorized lines from a Shakespearian play. Students love learning English at Junyi, because in overcoming the challenges of learning a second language, they've leaned on one another.

Research Question 2: What elements outside Junyi affect English language learning at Junyi?

Many students at Junyi are motivated to learn English because they view the English language as a bridge to the world outside Taiwan. They are excited to connect with others outside of Taiwan and explore new cultures, and they are eager for experiences that widen their perspectives of the world. One student even discussed how learning English would give her the means to share Taiwan's unique attributes with others. This theme, fostering global connections, appeared in all of the focus group interviews, indicating that students are conscious of how learning English helps them connect with individuals of varying backgrounds and cultures. Multiple students said that English "is the most used language in the world" or "English is a global language"; phrases I heard so frequently that I began to wonder if this was more than just a coincidence. It is clear from the qualitative interviews that

students are drawn to opportunities to allow them to engage in English language experiences outside of their classes at Junyi.

Students' Past Experiences have Catalyzed a High Interest in Intercultural Experiences

Some interviewed students had previously made connections with foreigners, and for them, it was a monumental moment that sparked their interest and motivation to learn English. A grade 10 student remembers being 12 or 13 years old, when a performing troupe from Germany visited her school. She recalled having better English skills than her classmates, and she was handpicked by her teacher to meet them. Although she was really nervous, afraid that "I couldn't say anything accurate," she was really excited to meet them. "From that time, learning English is really important." She now looks for all kinds of ways to learn English, whether it is through listening to and studying the lyrics of American pop music, watching YouTube videos, or reading online news articles. She aspires to study in London, one day.

Multiple students referenced past travels with family members, when they were thrust into situations to speak in English and translate for their family, in spite of their broken language skills. They admit their limited English abilities made them feel awkward and wished they could have spoken more fluently. Students hope, in an era post-COVID, they will be able to travel again and are excited to see their travel experiences deepen with improved English abilities.

Students at Junyi Seek Outside Influences that Motivate Them to Learn English

Several participating students are concurrently engaged in activities, outside of their academic classes, that motivate them to learn English. For example, a grade 11 student is motivated to learn English because of her interest in USA volleyball teams. She admits to following certain players, streaming games, watching video interview footage in her spare time. "I want to understand and learn a lot of things because I have a favorite volleyball team

in USA, but they won't post things in Chinese. If I want to understand what they are talking about, I have to learn."

Multiple students are motivated by content on YouTube channels and English songs. One student explained that at first, when she listened to English songs, she had to translate much of the lyrics to understand what it meant. Now that she's learned more vocabulary and figurative language, she "can just go understand it without translate it Chinese. [I] can really feel the feelings inside the song." It's apparent to her that translation services are limiting, and they impede her experience of listening to and connecting with music. With improved English proficiencies, students like her can seamlessly participate in cross-cultural, globalized music and video content.

The internet blurs the borders between countries, and it is incredibly easy for adolescents to access and engage with varied content. Through social media and video sharing sites, students can watch and learn about environmental issues and sociocultural topics. Korea's BTS boy band is just as accessible as American songwriters Khalid and John Legend. As one may say, *the world is your oyster*, and students at Junyi are eager to take the opportunities that life has to offer. They perceive the English language as their means of doing so.

Even though most students at Junyi do not have daily contact with native English speakers outside of the school community, the qualitative data indicates that they are open to new, intercultural experiences, and they are motivated to improve their ability to communicate in English, their second language. This motivation is predicted to directly affect students' L2 WTC (Yashima et al., 2004). Those who aspire to engage in intercultural communication would demonstrate the behavioral intention to communicate and likely engage with others using the second language more frequently (Yashima, 2002).

It is in Junyi's best interest to continue to cultivate students' enthusiasm for international affairs, because students' international posture – an "interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, and a readiness to interact with intercultural partners" (Yashima et al., 2004, p. 125) predicts motivation, which significantly predicts English proficiency. Yashima et al.'s (2004) hypothesized model, shown below in Figure #2, was supported by their data. Those who are more interested in international activities were more motivated to study the L2; higher level of motivation is related to self-confidence, which results in WTC in the L2 (Yashima et al., 2004).

Figure 2.

L2 Communication Model (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004, p. 127)
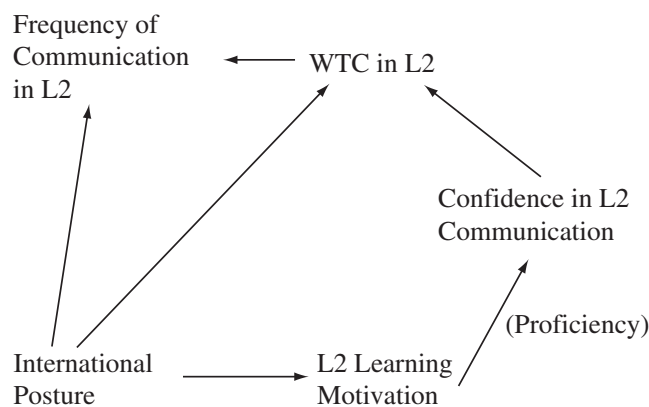
Students' perception of the utility of English language affects English language learning

Some students are motivated to learn English, because they perceive the language as a tool and affordance for better career prospects in their future. In this way, English is perceived as a socio-cultural asset; it is a means of acquiring knowledge and obtaining opportunities. For many, this idea stemmed from their parents. The anecdotal evidence suggests that parent perceptions of English do influence students' motivation for learning English. All of the students, whose parents believe learning English is an important skill for one's future, have goals of using English to engage with the global community in their future. Most students believe that English proficiency would grant them a more successful career

and future. For some, they aspire to study abroad one day. For example, one grade 10 student aspires to attend college in London, and a grade 9 student dreams of studying college abroad at a United World College program.

Students who may not aspire to leave Taiwan also speak to the importance of learning English for their future goals. A grade 10 student explained that learning English will improve his abilities of studying chemical engineering in college. A grade 9 student is motivated to learn English to celebrate Taiwan's culture with others. Another grade 9 student envisions staying in Taiwan and working in a tech company. He describes one day meeting clients from other countries, traveling abroad for work, and maybe "making friends with other people" along the way. He recognized that knowing English would be important, even if he chose to stay in Taiwan.

Students at Junyi are motivated to learn English because they perceive the English language as a bridge to connect with others outside of Taiwan. For some, an early experience sparked an interest. For others, they've established a feedback loop of learning English as a means to further their current passions. Lastly, some interviewed students perceive English as a tool to offer brighter future opportunities, and they remain motivated to do in hopes of reaping rewards later on. It is apparent that students at Junyi are eager to connect with and participate in global conversations.

Socio-Economic Status

Qualitative data also indicates that socioeconomic class, familial background and locality also affect students' participation in English classes. These outside elements were presented from the teachers' point of view; none of the student interviews suggest that they are consciously aware of what sociocultural and institutional elements affect their engagement in learning English.

Students who are afforded the opportunity to receive additional English language classes outside Junyi, attending cram schools or *bushibans*, tend to participate more in English language classes. Teachers at Junyi observed the influence that students' socioeconomic background has on students' participation in English class, explaining that the "extra exposure and study time students receive at *bushibans* reinforces already learned vocabulary and grammar patterns, as well as builds upon them. Students tend to become more confident and have higher participation when they make these connections in class." As Yashima et al. (2004) explains, students with greater perceived communicative competence gain confidence in using a second language, which in turn increases their willingness to communicate. This conclusion was corroborated by Lin's (2019) empirical study of Taiwanese EFL students. The scholarly literature confirms what teachers have observed at Junyi - students who have the financial means to attend *bushibans* will develop greater language competence, confidence, and thus become motivated to learn more.

However, teachers perceived that students from wealthier, privileged families to exhibit less appreciation for the English language opportunities at Junyi. A teacher recalls a boarding student from an affluent family: "I would say he is in the bottom 25% of his class… he doesn't seem to care, he doesn't try that hard." Although the student's English is good enough "to have a basic conversation, he doesn't really care to really be fluent [in English]." When asked what might be a root cause for the student's apathy, the teacher speculates that the student is certain that their math and science scores, combined with their average English abilities, will ensure that he is admitted to a good college. Without there being other driving forces to motivate him, the student "just doesn't work that hard…and I think sometimes he doesn't understand why other people do."

Familial Background and Locale

Teachers told me that students from remote areas who attend Junyi, including rural townships, aboriginal villages, and Taiwan's neighboring Orchid Island and Green Island, "tend to have more pride in their ability to learn English…and appreciate and value the opportunity to be at [Junyi]." This is evident by the way to which students from rural townships and aboriginal backgrounds openly participate in English class, in such a way that made teachers believe they are less afraid of making mistakes. When there is an opportunity to converse in English, these students are more willing to try "and maybe not do it perfectly. They are less cowed by that." Teachers applaud their students' willingness to try new things, whether it be volunteering an answer in class, pronouncing a difficult word, or completing an oral presentation.

One teacher noted that students from remote areas "want to show others that they are able to do this…at the same time, a lot of them have to work a lot harder." This comment highlights a reality that is frequently identified in the Taiwan education scholarly literature; Taiwanese students from rural townships have been historically afforded less opportunity and access to quality education. There is a shortage of qualified English teachers in rural elementary schools, and compared with teachers in remote areas, urban teachers were found to have more teaching resources (Chang, 2004). Students' access to English resources was limited (Huang, 2000; Tsai, 2011). The stark reality that these students have to "work harder to get there" and "many may not get to the same level" explains the result of generations of history that benefits some and not others.

The narratives illustrated by the teachers at Junyi align with the reported achievement gaps in Taiwan. A research study, conducted by Sung et al. (2014), reveals some telling data about the achievement gap observed in Taiwan's school system, based on the participants' national junior high school standardized achievement test scores from 2004 – 2010. In this

time frame, the average test scores reveal score discrepancies between different genders, socioeconomic statuses, ethnicities, and school districts. It is of particular interest that the data shows aboriginal students have lower scores than their non-aboriginal counterparts, and the score discrepancies are significant. The differences in scores are also observed from students from low and average socioeconomic families, students from remote and urban areas. The differences in test scores among students with different backgrounds indicate the existence of achievement gaps, and the achievement gaps among students from different socioeconomic status and school districts have widened over the 7 years.

Although Sung et al.'s (2014) disaggregated scores are only from 2004 – 2010, the results from their study indicate an important realization: Junyi's observed problem of practice is not unique to Junyi, but the relative underperformance on standardized tests by minoritized populations is a pervasive phenomenon in Taiwan across subject areas and grade levels. Junyi's external testing results show that their students' English proficiency is below the national average, and this aligns with what was observed in Taiwan in the late 2000s. Due to a lack of demographic data available to disaggregate the scores, I cannot directly compare Junyi's external test results to that presented in Sung et al.'s study, because Junyi's test results are not from 2004 to 2010, and therefore the way the scores are transformed and scaled differ.

Limitations

Like all projects, this study has its limitations, which need to be taken into consideration when evaluating project findings. As stated in the methods section, this quality improvement project relies heavily on qualitative data, attained through convenience sampling methods. The small sample of 17 students and 5 English teachers may result in biased data and data that lacks rigor. Had we had time and access to additional data, it is possible that we might uncover narratives that differ from what was discussed in this

capstone. While the qualitative data provides a rich description of Junyi's learning environments, it is not representative of all students and the many narratives and perspectives that exist in this diverse school community. Furthermore, all the student interviews were conducted in English. The students insisted on interviewing in English, even when an option of Mandarin was made available; it is possible that the students were unable to accurately depict nuanced ideas in their second language.

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

The recommendations that follow are based on the rich narratives from the students and English teachers of Junyi. The recommendations collectively address the problem of practice of high school students underperforming, relative to the national average, on General Scholastic Ability Test (GSAT) and Comprehensive Assessment Program (CAP) English external assessments. While not exhaustive, these recommendations offer insights and future considerations for Junyi.

Recommendation 1. Attend to the size of English classes as a means of preserving the student experience that affords a high-quality English language learning environment.

Creating a learning environment that cultivates close peer relationships and student-teacher relationships is tremendously beneficial for promoting confidence and motivating students to authentically communicate with one another in English. When students are relationally connected with others, they are less anxious and they are more willing to ask questions and take risks. Junyi needs to ensure that the learning environments engender students' willingness to seek out communication opportunities and bring about a willingness to communicate in English. One area of concern amongst students and teachers is the growing size of Junyi's English classes. While class size does not necessarily create a learning environment that affords WTC, the number of students in a class impacts peer-student relations and affects what types of activities are possible. Student narratives illustrate

the importance of creating a learning environment that generates positive affect that is shared by the entire class community, because it influences students' willingness to communicate.

Recommendation 2. Identify supplementary ways to assess student learning in English to measure student progress.

The problems of assessing English proficiency solely based on external assessments scores is well documented in the scholarly literature (Menken, 2006; Solórzano, 2008; Pray, 2005). To diversify the assessment tools, Junyi can consider a range of outcomes that indicate achievement and progress in English language proficiency. For example, Junyi could track students' progress over time and determine to what extent they progress out of the lowest level of English class. Junyi could also implement their own English proficiency assessments at the beginning and end of each school year and include important communicative elements not currently measured by external standardized examinations. Questionnaires with a Likert scale could provide meaningful information on students' motivation in English language learning, and could again offer benchmarks for students over their time at Junyi. This range of internal data would allow the school to determine and articulate their students' development of English fluency and orientation toward English language across an academic calendar year and across their tenure as a student at Junyi.

Recommendation 3. Identify opportunities for students to practice the practices of standardized test-taking, without reducing the communicative emphasis of Junyi's English program.

It is apparent that the strength of Junyi's English program resides in its rich, dynamic learning environments that cultivate students' willingness to communicate. Students' close relationships with their peers and teachers foster the motivation and confidence that supports their desire to communicate in English. The English teachers at Junyi should work proactively to preserve these characteristics of the learning environment while they also

identify opportunities for students to intentionally 'practice the practices' of standardized test-taking (Reardon, 1990). By strategically identifying points in the curriculum to emphasize the necessary, albeit strange, nature of English-exam-English, teachers can support skills that are necessary for achievement in Taiwan's test-valuing education system without compromising the true goals of Junyi's English language program. Some potential leverage points could be in changing the format and language of certain aspects of the unit tests and homework assignments, for example, students may be better equipped to taking external exams.

My capstone project at the Junyi School of Innovation began as a quest to discover the insufficiencies that might account for their students' low English proficiency external assessment scores. Upon exploring students' perceptions of learning English, corroborated by teacher interviews and classroom observations, the data gathered suggest a very different narrative. Junyi is offering a quality English language learning experience that minimizes students' language anxiety, fosters enjoyment, and cultivates close relationships that deepen their motivation and confidence to take on the challenges of learning a second language. Preserving this student experience is crucial to continuing Junyi's successful English language program. Identifying supplementary ways to measure student progress and opportunities for students to practice standardized test-taking skills will allow Junyi to articulate their students' development of English fluency and better equip students to take external exams.

References

Abedi, J. (2002, April). *Issues and problems in classification of students with limited English proficiency*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (1997). *Qualitative research for education*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Brenner, M. E. (2006). Interviewing in educational research. *Handbook of complementary methods for research in education,* 357-370.

Cao, Y., & Philp, J. (2006). Interactional context and willingness to communicate: A comparison of behavior in whole class, group and dyadic interaction. *System, 34*(4), 480–493.

Chang, Y. (2004). *A study on the differences of English teaching in urban and rural elementary schools* [Master's thesis, National Hsinchu University of Education, Hsinchu, Taiwan]. Retrieved from http://handle.ncl.edu.tw/11296/ndltd/68670208267105317815

Elahi Shirvan, M., Khajavy, G., MacIntyre, P., & Taherian, T. (2019). A Meta-analysis of L2 Willingness to Communicate and Its Three High-Evidence Correlates. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research, 48*(6), 1241–1267.

Everington, K. (June 23, 2020). *Taiwan to launch '2030 Bilingual Country Project'* Retrieved February 7, 2021 from https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3952051

Financial Supervisory Commission Republic of China (Taiwan). (2019, March 27). Taiwan's 2030 goal to become a bilingual nation. https://www.fsc.gov.tw/en/home.jsp?id=253&parentpath=0,4,212,252

Huang, Y. (2008). *The action research on informal English teaching program to disadvantaged students in a remote area [*Master's thesis, National Dong Hwa

University, Hualien, Taiwan]. Retrieved from

http://handle.ncl.edu.tw/11296/ndltd/53065770637539623966

Immordino-Yang, M.H., & Damasio, A. (2007). We feel, therefore we learn: The relevance

of affective and social neuroscience in education. *Mind, Brain, and Education, 1*(1), 3-

10.

Kang, S-J. (2005). Dynamic emergence of situational willingness to communicate in a second

language. *System, 33*(2), 277–292.

Khajavy, G., MacIntyre, P., & Barabadi, E. (2018). Role of the emotions and classroom

environment in willingness to communicate: Applying doubly latent multilevel analysis

in second language acquisition research. *Studies in Second Language*

Acquisition, 40(3), 605-624. doi:10.1017/S0272263117000304

Kreuger, R. A. (2002). *Designing and conducting focus group interviews.*

https://www.eiu.edu/ihec/Krueger-FocusGroupInterviews.pdf

Larsen-Freeman, D. (2007). Reflecting on the cognitive–social debate in second language

acquisition. *The Modern Language Journal, 91*(s1), 773–787.

Lin, Y-T. (2019). Taiwanese EFL learners' willingness to communicate in English in the

classroom: Impacts of personality, affect, motivation, and communication

confidence. *The Asia - Pacific Education Researcher, 28*(2), 101-113.

Liu, M., & Jackson, J. (2008). An exploration of Chinese EFL learners' unwillingness to

communicate and foreign language anxiety. *Modern Language Journal, 92*(1), 71–86.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Charos, C. (1996). Personality, attitudes, and affect as predictors of

second language communication. Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 15, 3–26.

MacIntyre, P.D., Clement, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K.A. (1998). Conceptualizing

willingness to communicate in a L2: a situational model of L2 confidence and

affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal, 8* (4), 545-562.

Menken, K. (2006). Teaching to the test: How no child left behind impacts language policy, curriculum, and instruction for English language learners. *Bilingual Research Journal, 30*(2), 521-546.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. Revised and Expanded from" Case Study Research in Education.".* Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome St, San Francisco, CA 94104.

Peng, J-E. (2012). Towards an ecological understanding of willingness to communicate in EFL classrooms in China. *System, 40*, 203-213.

Peng, J-E., & Woodrow, L. (2010). Willingness to communicate in English: A model in the Chinese ELF Classroom Context. *Language Learning, 60*(4), 834-876.

Pray, L. (2005). How well do commonly used language instruments measure English oral-language proficiency? *Bilingual Research Journal*, *29*(2), 387–409.

Price, G. (2014). English for all? Neoliberalism, globalization, and language policy in Taiwan. *Language in Society, 43*(5), 567-589.

Reardon, S. J. (1990). Putting reading tests in their place. *New Advocate, 3*(1), 29-37.

Solórzano, R.W. (2008). High stakes testing: issues, implications, and remedies for English language learners. *Review of Educational Research, 78*(2), 260-329.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Sung, Y., Sung, Y., Tseng, F., Tseng, F., Kuo, N., Kuo, N., Chang, T., Chang, T., Chiou, J., & Chiou, J. (2014). Evaluating the effects of programs for reducing achievement gaps: a case study in Taiwan. Asia Pacific Education Review, 15(1), 99–113.

Teimouri, Y., Goetze, J., & Plonsky, L. (2019). SECOND LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND ACHIEVEMENT: A META-ANALYSIS. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *41*(2), 363–387.

Tsai, S. (2011). *A study in the effects of English story-telling instruction on students' English listening comprehension at remote elementary schools* (Master's thesis, National Changhua University of Education, Changhua, Taiwan). Retrieved from http://handle.ncl.edu.tw/11296/ndltd/45511028137562528182

Syrja, R. C. (2011). *How to reach and teach English language learners: Practical strategies to ensure success.* Jossey-Bass.

Yashima, T. (2002). Willingness to communicate in a second language: The Japanese EFL context. *Modern Language Journal, 86*(1), 54–66.

Yashima, T., Zenuk-Nishide, L, & Shimizu, K. (2004). The influence of attitudes and affect on willingness to communicate and second language communication. *Language Learning, 54*(1), 119-152.

Wen, W.P., & Clément, R. (2003). A Chinese conceptualisation of willingness to communicate in ESL. *Language, Culture and Curriculum,16* (1), 18-38.

Zarrinabadi, N., & Tanbakooei, N. (2016). Willingness to Communicate: Rise, Development, and Some Future Directions: Willingness to Communicate. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, *10*(1), 30–45.

Appendix A

Table A1
GSAT English Proficiency Results for Junyi School of Innovation in 2020, 2019, and 2018.

	2020 GSAT		2019 GSAT		2018 GSAT	
	Number of Students	**Percent**	**Number of Students**	**Percent**	**Number of Students**	**Percent**
Average	2	8	1	4.3	0	0
Above average	8	32	9	39.1	9	50
Below average	15	60	13	56.5	9	50
Total	25		23		18	

Table A2
Comprehensive Assessment Program for Junior High School Students English Proficiency Results for Junyi School of Innovation in 2019 and 2018.

		2019 CAP			2018 CAP		
		Number of Students	Percent Students	National Percentage	Number of Students	Percent Students	National Percentage
Advanced	A++	0	10.50%	22.89%	1	8.30%	20.84
	A+	2			1		
	A	4			2		
Basic	B++	4	67%	46.91	11	66.7	48.39
	B+	12			7		
	B	22			14		
To be strengthened	C	13	23%	30.2	12	25%	30.77
	Total	**57**			**48**		

Table A3
Percentage of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Junyi Students Who Performed Above and Below Average on the GSAT Exam in 2020, 2019, and 2018.

	2020 GSAT		2019 GSAT		2018 GSAT	
	Aboriginal	**Not Aboriginal**	**Aboriginal**	**Not Aboriginal**	**Aboriginal**	**Not Aboriginal**
Above average	12%	20%	4.30%	34.70%	11%	38.90%
Below average	8%	52%	30.40%	26%	11%	38.90%

Table A4
Percentage of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Junyi Students Who Performed Above and Below Average on the GSAT in 2018 – 2020.

	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
Average and Above	9.1 %	34.8 %
Below average	16.7 %	39.4 %

Table A5
Comprehensive Assessment Program (CAP) for Junior High School Students English Proficiency Results: Number of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Junyi Students in 2018 and 2019.

		2019 CAP		2018 CAP	
		Aboriginal	Not Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Not Aboriginal
Advanced	A++	0	0	0	1
	A+	0	2	0	1
	A	1	3	1	1
Basic	B++	1	3	4	7
	B+	1	11	4	3
	B	5	17	10	4
To be strengthened	C	6	7	5	7

Table A5 shows English proficiency results on the Comprehensive Assessment Program for Junior High School Students, parsed by aboriginal and non-aboriginal Junyi students. The data shows that in 2019, fourteen of the Junyi students are aboriginal and seven scored in the 'Basic' range and six students scored in the 'To Be Strengthened' range. Almost half of the aboriginal students scored in the lowest range, whereas only 16.3% of the non-aboriginal students scored in the lowest range.

Appendix B

Focus Group Protocol

Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is Ms. Evelyn Chen and I'll be your moderator today for today's important discussion. I asked you all to be here to share your experiences of participating in English language learning classes. My role is to direct the content and flow of our talk and make sure that we cover the main topics. I also want to make sure that everyone has the chance to share their experiences. We appreciate the time you're taking out of your school day to contribute to our research study.

早上好，我叫 Evelyn Chen 女士，今天我將主持您今天的重要討論。我要求大家在這裡分享您參加英語學習課程的經驗。我的角色是指導談話的內容和流程，並確保我們涵蓋主要主題。我還想確保每個人都有機會分享他們的經驗。感謝您抽出寶貴的時間為我們的研究工作做出貢獻。

There are no wrong answers but rather different points of view. Please feel free to share your perspective even if it differs from what others have said. Keep in mind that we're interested in listening to anything that you are willing to share.

沒有錯誤的答案，而是不同的觀點。即使您的觀點與其他人的觀點有所不同，也請隨時分享您的觀點。請記住，我們有興趣聽您願意分享的任何內容。

Please be advised that although I will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents us from guaranteeing confidentiality. I would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

我想提醒與會人員尊重與會人員的隱私，不要在焦點小組中向其他人重複。

Today's focus group session will be audio recorded. You probably noticed the microphone. We are audio recording the session because people often say very helpful things in these discussions and I can't write fast enough to record it all down. While we may address each other by first name here, your names will not be used in any of our reports. These audio recordings will be used for the research study.

今天的焦點小組會議將錄製音頻。您可能注意到了麥克風。我們正在錄製會議的音頻，因為人們經常在這些討論中說出非常有幫助的話，而我寫得還不夠快，無法全部記錄下來。雖然我們可能在此處用名字互相稱呼，但您的名字將不會在我們的任何報告中使用。這些錄音將用於研究。

Before we start today, I would like to give you a chance to ask any questions about the study before we start today.

[pause]

Are we ready to begin?

[pause]

你有任何問題嗎？我們準備好開始了嗎？

Today's focus group topic will ask you to share your experiences learning English as Taiwanese students. There are two Junyi classes that are primarily taught in English – English and Combined Studies, and I believe you've been a student in one or both classes. We are interested in hearing about your experiences learning English here at Junyi, as well as your other experiences learning English.

Focus Group Questions:

1. How long have you been learning English? How long have you been a student at Junyi?

   您學習英語多長時間了？

2. Describe what it's like for you to learn English here – at Junyi or more broadly, in Taiwan.

   學習英語感覺如何？

3. Can you describe a time when you enjoyed participating in classes that are taught in English?

   您是否可以分享自己喜歡參加以英語授課的課程的時間？

4. Can you think back to a time when you did not want to participate in an English-speaking class?

   您可以回想一下不想參加英語課的時候嗎？

5. Are you motivated to learn English? What motivates you to learn English?

   您有學習英語的動力嗎？是什麼促使您學習英語的？

6. What do you think of your English proficiency?

   您如何看待您的英語能力？

7. Do you think it's important to speak English as native speakers?

   您認為以英語為母語很重要嗎？

Appendix C

Teacher Interview Protocol

Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is Ms. Evelyn Chen and I'll be interviewing you today. Thank you for coming; I appreciate the time you're taking out of your school day to contribute to our research study. You were asked to meet with me for a one-on-one interview because you teach English class or Combined Studies class, the two classes that are taught in English at Junyi. The purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences participating in English language learning classes. The questions I will ask during today's interview will ask you to reflect upon your experiences working with English language learners.

Today's interview will be audio recorded. You probably noticed the microphone. We are audio recording the session because participants often say very helpful things and I can't write fast enough to record it all down. These audio recordings will only be used for the research study. We will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data. While we may address each other here by first name here, your name will not be used in any of our reports. Results will be presented so that no person is individually identifiable. Do I have your permission to audio record our interview today?

[pause]

You are not required to answer every question. If there's a question you would prefer not to answer, simply say, 'pass.' Please also note that there are no wrong answers. Feel free to share your perspective. I am interested in listening to anything that you are willing to share.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

[pause]

Questions:
1. Would you mind sharing your experience teaching English? How long have you been teaching English to non-native students? How long have you been teaching at Junyi?
2. What motivates Junyi students to learn English? To improve their English proficiency?
3. When do students at Junyi enjoy participating in English class?
4. When do students at Junyi not participate in English class?
5. What internal and external factors impact Taiwanese students' participation in classes that are taught in English?
6. The school community at Junyi is very diverse. There are multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented in the student community. There are also socioeconomic differences among the student community. Are there any noticeable differences in students' engagement in learning English based on their ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds?
7. Do you notice any patterns about the way to which students interact with each another in your English class?