A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FORMER ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS

Nguessan T. Yobouet
Southeastern University - Lakeland

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FORMER

ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS

By

NGUESSAN THOSTAO YOBOUET

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the
College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Education
in Curriculum and Instruction

Southeastern University
May, 2021

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FORMER

ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS

by

NGUESSAN THOSTAO YOBOUET

Dissertation Approved:

_____

Dr. Sarah J. Yates, Ed.D., Dissertation Chair

_____

Dr. Janet L. Deck, Ed.D., Methodologist

_____

Dr. Mechel M. Albano, Ed.D., Committee Member

_____

Dr. Jim Anderson, Ph.D., Dean, College of Education

DEDICATION

Walt Disney once said, "All our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them." Obtaining a doctorate was a lifelong dream that I decided to pursue to honor my parents who were not fortunate enough to obtain a college degree. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother and father who guided my first steps towards God Almighty and constantly encouraged me to believe in myself. My determination and passion to pursue a doctorate might have dulled without their prayers and unwavering support.

I also dedicate this work to my wife and children who supported me, believed in me, and always accommodated my absence for my research. Their support and understanding are the reasons why this achievement was possible. To my wife, children, mother and father, my deepest desire is to always honor and support you through perseverance, and determination. Thank you for supporting me in this adventure.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Completing a dissertation is a team effort. Therefore, I am very grateful to each of the individuals who played an active role in the dynamic team that made this project possible. My deepest gratitude and appreciation go to Dr. Sarah Yates, my mentor, committee chair, and coordinator of the curriculum and instruction specialization. Dr. Yates, your professionalism, positivity, and prayers have inexorably empowered me along this challenging journey. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Janet Deck, my dissertation methodologist and director of the Department of Doctoral Studies in Education, and to Dr. Mechel Albano, another appreciated committee member. Your insightful comments, feedback, and criticism have guided me and taught me a lot about the process of researching and writing a doctoral degree.

 I would also like to thank Dr. James Anderson and Dr. Amy Bratten who, four years ago, paved the way for this adventure by welcoming me, advising me, and preparing me to begin this doctoral program. However, this adventure would not have been possible without the support and guidance of each of my instructors who have helped me along the way by providing quality instruction. Among them, my gratitude goes to Dr. Patty Leblanc and Dr. Thomas Gollery who continuously encouraged me to believe in myself. My gratitude also goes to Dr. Cassandra Lopez who helped my committee members refine my dissertation by providing valuable writing support and feedback.

I would like to express my gratitude to many other people whose contributions have been valuable to me in this journey. I am grateful to all of my classmates and cohort members with

whom I learned so much through discussion posts, collaborative activities, and group presentations. The time I spent with the participants in this research study has enriched my data collection experience and sparked my desire to conduct additional research studies to contribute to the body of literature in my field. I would like to thank you as well.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my wife, children, extended family members, and friends who have continually supported and pushed me to reach this level of accomplishment.

Abstract

Many people in school settings have been successful in learning foreign languages, including English. While schools have helped provide this opportunity, the increasing rate of student disinterest in foreign languages is evidence that schools have not yet fully achieved their goals in foreign language education. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of former students who have successfully learned English as a foreign language outside of school.

Specifically, this study aimed to describe and interpret the sociocultural dimension of EFL (English as a foreign language) learning. To determine the importance of the sociocultural dimension of foreign language learning, this study utilized a qualitative phenomenological study approach. Using a criterion sampling strategy, three male and two female participants who learned English in different non-English speaking countries were selected to share their experiences. Data were collected through ten semi-structured open-ended questions posed to the participants. The responses were analyzed using Creswell and Poth's five-step spiral data analysis process. The findings indicated that in an environment where English is not the primary means of communication, practicing with friends, interacting with English-speaking family members, joining English clubs, and spending time with native speakers are excellent ways to learn English as a foreign language outside of school. These findings suggest that while sociocultural considerations help improve language skills, learning experiences both in and out of school are necessary to excel in foreign language learning.

*Keyword*s: English as a foreign language; sociocultural interaction; cultural awareness; out-of-school learning strategies; foreign language learning challenges

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

I. INTRODUCTION

In the United States, being fluent in a language other than English is viewed as a rare accomplishment; elsewhere in the world, knowledge of more than one language is common. This discrepancy has resulted in the United States' poor ranking when debating world countries' interest in learning foreign languages (Devlin, 2018). The results of a recent survey conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed that less than 20% of school-aged Americans are interested in learning a foreign language compared to 92% of the same category of learners in Europe (Devlin, 2018).

Reasons for students' disinterest in learning a foreign language vary (Yang & Wang, 2018). Stein-Smith (2019) observed that Americans are legendarily reluctant to learn another language. Most American students neglect foreign languages because English is studied and spoken widely. Other scholars, including Swanson and Mason (2018), mentioned a teacher shortage reason. According to Acheson, Taylor, and Luna (2016), only a few states can fill their foreign language teaching positions every year.

However, foreign language learning matters for several reasons. Deveci (2015) indicated that learning foreign languages constitutes a window into the world and helps individuals meet and learn from other people. Mazari and Derraz (2016) held that many individuals have understood the culture of others by learning foreign languages. American students who are not interested in learning a foreign language may miss out on developing cultural intelligence

including how to communicate and relate to people who are not American (Ang, Rockstuhl, & Tan, 2015). To travel the world for employment, business, or pleasure purposes, while comprehending others' behavior and ways of thinking, is necessary (Bordia & Bordia, 2015).

Commenting on the importance of foreign language learning experiences, Ostler (2005) observed:

> Most people in the world are multilingual, and everybody could be; no one is rigorously excluded from another's language community except through lack of time and effort. Different languages protect and nourish the growth of different cultures, where different pathways of human knowledge can be discovered. They certainly make life richer for those who know more than one of them. (p. 331)

Background of the Study

Many students have become proficient in foreign languages because they were exposed to practices that facilitated the learning process. Starks, Yoble and Moeller (2015) found that the use of technology could turn learning difficult foreign languages like German into a fun experience. Using technology can instill the joy of learning in foreign language students (Weinberg, 2017). Video clips, sound effects, images, or pictographs in a PowerPoint presentation could hold the attention of the learners (Mathur, 2019). Naseri and Motallebzadeh (2016) indicated that foreign language students could learn any course content through podcasting.

Some students have learned foreign languages because they love games. Research has shown that games can entertain learners and have them show an interest in the language (Ge & Ifenthaler, 2017). With games, students learn in a less formal way, and mistakes can be tolerated (Flores, 2015). Yukselturk, Altiok, and Başer (2018) recommended that teachers integrate games

into technology to facilitate the learning process. Game-based language learning helps students work as a team while communicating and interacting. Utilizing a game to learn a foreign language also facilitates self-learning and develops problem-solving skills, which can improve brain functioning abilities (Woodrow, 2017).

Some students learn faster through storytelling, which several studies have encouraged (Sarıca & Usluel, 2016). Research has demonstrated that stories have power that helps enhance the retention skills of the learner (Sarıca & Usluel, 2016). Many young people like storytelling because stories increase their attention span (Robin, 2016). Mundy-Taylor, May, and Reynolds (2015) discovered that children's love for stories eventually creates a desire to learn more about languages. In that respect, Nicolopoulou (2019) postulated that stories can promote both written and oral language skills. A foreign language learner who is frequently told stories feels inspired and develops verbal skills in that language (Hwang et al., 2016).

Students who have experienced active learning techniques have recognized the benefits the method provides for learning a foreign language (Agbatogun, 2014). In the learning process, students need to take an active part to ensure retention of the content. When studying communication skills in students learning a foreign language, Piriyasurawong (2019) held that students who have experienced active learning practices are aware of their transformation from a spectator to an active participant using and experiencing the language. An effective way for the students to become active learners is to take part in a cultural event related to the language they are learning (Blaz, 2018). Agbatogun (2014) observed that the active learning strategy provides foreign language learners with the opportunity to develop their ability to communicate in the language they are learning. Mulatu and Bezabih (2018) studied students learning English in Ethiopia and discovered that active learning stimulates students' interest in learning the new

language, develops their collaborative abilities, and helps improve their critical thinking skills in the new language.

Other learners recognized being more productive when their learning experience combined face-to-face and distance learning materials (Park, Yu, & Jo, 2016). Learning a foreign language using the flipped classroom technique encourages learners' participation and promotes support from the teacher and other students in the classroom (Yilmaz, 2017). Students enjoy reading and watching some videos at home before they utilize class time for discussions and practice in using the language skills they studied (Chen Hsieh, Wu, & Marek, 2017). This strategy increases students' preparation time because learners have more time at home than in the classroom to work on the language skills. Basal (2015) explained that the flipped classroom technique gives foreign language learners confidence and control over the material. Confidence in practicing the foreign language is reinforced by the feeling of readiness and intelligence that the students develop over time (Alsowat, 2016).

Finally, research indicated that foreign language learners like to be challenged by higher-level questions. Yu, Bonawitz, and Shafto (2019) held that students who are exposed to higher order questions learn faster than their counterparts who are asked lower-level questions. DeWaelsche (2015) studied Korean students learning English and noted that answering higher-level questions is a sign of proficiency and mastery. Questions help clarify learners' minds and dissipate misconceptions. The learners develop critical thinking skills by answering higher-level questions (Kapler, Weston, & Wiseheart, 2015). Students demonstrate readiness and show knowledge by providing responses to the questions their teacher asks.

An abundance of methods exists for people interested in learning foreign languages. However, most of the existing literature emphasizes strategies to learn the language in a formal

school context. Mazari and Derraz (2016) indicated that foreign languages are not exclusive to a formal school-based learning process since much of the learners' experiences employ socio-cultural values. For optimal outcomes, students should balance school-based and socio-cultural learning experiences when learning a foreign language (Mazari & Derraz, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

Gardner (1988) was one of the first researchers to signal the important role that society and culture play in foreign language learning. In the Socio-Educational Model, Gardner (1988) explained that the social milieu is a crucial factor in the acquisition of foreign languages. The cultural beliefs within the social setting are influential to the learners' attitudes toward the learning experience.

In the linguistic self-confidence theory, Noels, Pon, and Clément (1996) suggested that foreign language learning is the result of a collaboration between the learner and the social milieu. As a social construct, the self-confidence theory derives not only from the quantity but also the quality of contact between the learner and the community. The more the learners interact well with their social environment, the more they become proficient in the target language. Noels, Pon, and Clément (1996) indicated that social interaction can foster self-confidence in students when learning English as a foreign language.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of former learners of English as a foreign language. This study intended to describe and interpret the socio-cultural dimension of learning English as a foreign language.

Overview of Methodology

Research Design

This study used a phenomenology approach to understand the lived experiences of former learners of English as a foreign language. A phenomenology method was used because this type of research is best to describe and interpret how human beings experience certain phenomena (Chapdelaine, Shields, & Forwell, 2017). The interview was semi-structured allowing questions to be prepared ahead of time. To focus on participants who can provide the information needed, the study employed a purposeful sampling strategy. A contrived setting that used a telephone was employed to increase the chance that all the subjects participate in the interviews at a time and place that was most convenient for them. Finally, the bracketing system was applied to ascertain that any preconceived knowledge about the phenomenon being studied was set aside (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Questions

The study's participants, who are all former students of English as a foreign language, were invited to share their lived experiences about how they learned English. The study was guided by the following research questions:

(Q1): What are the lived experiences of a student who learned English as a foreign language within a non-English speaking culture?

(Q2): What are strategies for learning English as a foreign language within a non-English speaking culture?

Data Collection

The data were collected from the participants using in-depth interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants received a consent form that was signed before the interviews

started. Using a criterion sampling, the study collected interviews from five subjects who have shared experiences for learning English as a foreign language within a non-English speaking culture (Dukes, 1984). Each interview was conducted over the telephone and lasted for approximatively 30 minutes. To capture the data needed and ensure descriptive validity, the interviews were recorded using a digital sound recorder. This recording option facilitated the transfer of the interview to a computer and helped avoid undesired background noises. An audio interchange file format was used to save the interview and facilitate the transcription process.

Procedures

After the university's approval of the Institutional Review Board form, each subject selected to participate in this study was scheduled for an interview. Participants were sent an electronic consent form for review. The consent form explained the interview protocols, risks, ethical conduct, and confidentiality measures. Once the consent forms were signed, each participant was contacted over the phone for a 30-minute interview. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The transcripts were sent to the interviewees to ensure accuracy and authenticity. To maintain confidentiality, the interviews were coded and stored digitally. The transcription was followed by a detailed interpretation of the meaning the participants ascribed to their experiences. A list of significant statements was made and grouped into themes for their interpretation.

<div align="center">

Limitations

</div>

This study sought to understand the lived experiences of former learners of English as a foreign language. The study described and interpreted the socio-cultural aspects of learning English as a foreign language. Creswell (2013) suggested three to fifteen subjects, and Dukes (1984) recommended three to ten participants. However, due to the availability of people who

studied EFL (English as a Foreign Language), the sample size was limited to five participants. This number may not be representative of the larger population who studied EFL, thus affecting the generalizability of the results.

The lack of previous research represents another limitation in this study. Most literature about learning foreign languages addresses the role of the teacher in the classroom. Formal instructional practices for which the teacher is the main actor of learning represent the majority of findings about foreign languages (Mazari & Derraz, 2016). However, this study only focused on the role of society and culture in learning English as a foreign language. Therefore, access to the literature was limited and the findings could not be generalizable to learning other languages.

<div align="center">

Definition of Key Terms

</div>

The following words and phrases are key terms for the study.

EFL: stands for English as a Foreign Language. EFL is a term used for the study of the English language by a non-native population in a country where English is not a medium of daily communication (Master, Loeb, Whitney, & Wyckoff, 2016).

Comprehensible input: the idea that language learners can understand despite them not understanding every word in that language (Krashen, 2016).

Cultural competence: the ability to possess the skills required to handle cross-cultural relationships effectively (Tehee, Isaacs, & Rodríguez, 2020).

Intercultural communication: refers to verbal and nonverbal interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds (Tuncel & Paker, 2018).

Intercultural sensitivity: used to refer to the fact that an individual responds well to cultural differences (Çiloğlan & Bardakçi, 2019).

Language proficiency: the capacity of a learner to use language with a level of precision that transfers meaning in comprehension (Benrabah, 2019).

Significance of the Study

Research has revealed that knowledge of foreign languages helps students communicate across cultures, which contributes to improving their overall learning abilities (Hao, 2016). As students learn foreign languages, the probability that they acquire additional skills in other disciplines increases as well. Therefore, foreign language learning has become the focus of many nations' educational system. In the US, foreign language learning and education has gained national interest. In his September 15, 1999 speech entitled "Changing the American School to Fit Modern Times," U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley reaffirmed the federal government's interest in promoting foreign language education across the nation by extending it to all levels, including elementary, middle, and high schools. Since 1979, the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies has recommended foreign language education beyond the K12 setting. Many higher education institutions, including The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center at the University of Montana, train American soldiers and diplomats to investigate terrorism in zones where languages other than English are spoken. Therefore, the findings may help foreign language teachers in American schools and universities to understand the experience of learning a foreign language.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of former learners of English as a foreign language. This study describes and interprets the socio-cultural dimension of learning English as a foreign language. Ramírez-Esparza, García-Sierra, and Jiang (2020) held that the benefits of learning a foreign language increase as globalization gains ground. Bilingualism is becoming a real-world skill for individuals who want to keep up with the increasing global challenges. However, the United States has a shortfall in foreign language learning (Devlin, 2018). Learners in schools and universities still need new and efficient strategies to facilitate foreign language learning.

According to Richards (2015), only two dimensions to foreign language learning exist: formal and sociocultural-based learning in an informal context. Although more people are now interested in learning foreign languages outside of school, as stated by Richards (2015), many past language learning experiences took place in a school setting. However, the limitations of school-based language learning have been frequently recognized. For example, the opportunities for practicing or using foreign languages within a school setting are limited (Richards, 2015). An increase in human interaction has provided more opportunities for authentic language usage than are offered in schools (Richards, 2015).

Therefore, the literature review emphasized out-of-school foreign language learning strategies. Research concerning the historical, social, and cultural dimensions of foreign

language learning and strategies revealed that most previous studies investigated strategies for learning foreign languages in a school context. Research on out-of-school foreign language learning was scarce with most coming from non-English speaking countries that have set an importance on learning English as a foreign language.

Historical Overview of Foreign Language Learning

Mostly regarded as the starting point for research concerning foreign language learning, behaviorism stipulated that a language is learned through habit (Skinner, 1957). According to behaviorist theory, people learn by repeating and imitating the words of people around them. Skinner's (1957) operant conditioning research found that any human behavior, including foreign language, can be learned through the stimulus-response-reinforcement (S-R-R) process (Skinner, 1957). Using the S-R-R process, correct verbal repetition is positively reinforced while an incorrect repetition is punished or negatively reinforced. The classical conditioning concept demonstrated that all human behaviors, including verbal behaviors and habits, are learned (Gray, 1980). However, researchers including Piaget (1959) contested the validity of behaviorist theory stating that language learning is more a practical experience than mere repetition or habit.

In the late 1950s, Piaget's (1959) critique of the behaviorist theory led to the development of a new form of foreign language learning approach known as cognitivism. This theory presented foreign language learning as a cognitive activity (Piaget, 1959). People who learn a language undergo a mental effort involving a capacity of thinking that behaviorism failed to address. During the learning process, language learners can be active learners and engage the brain in information processing activities. To this effect, Piaget's (1959) research revealed that language learning cannot take place without the cognitive development of the learner. Cognition develops through a reasoned thinking process employing information processing and retention

11

strategies. Inspired by Piaget's (1959) theory of cognitive development, Vygotsky (1978) found

that second language learning is a dynamic process in which the learner is perceived as both an

active thinker and a processor of information (Lupyan & Bergen, 2016). In short, language

learning is a mental activity in which the learner becomes an active participant.

During the 19th century, constructivism developed as a new foreign language approach

built on cognitivism and opposing behaviorism. According to constructivism, foreign language

learning developed through human activity. The learning activity was no longer viewed as an

imitation of adults as was theorized in behaviorism (Mattar, 2018). Vygotsky's (1978) research

found that learning starts when people meet and interact to construct knowledge. According to

Vygotsky (1978), learners build on personal experiences gained from their active interactions

with their peers. Similarly, Piaget (1959) discovered that language learning is an active process

during which learners work together to construct artifacts or knowledge. The constructivist

theory marks the beginning of an understanding of the role that society and culture play in

foreign language learning. However, the effectiveness of constructivism was thought to be

limited to the school context (Mattar, 2018).

In the 21st century, Siemens (2005) and Downes (2008) introduced connectivism.

Connectivism holds that foreign language learners create a mental connection between the

information they learn using exemplars of language input. The learner demonstrates decision-

making capabilities as the information is being processed. This capability forms connections

between the information. However, when making a connection, the mind distinguishes credible

from non-credible sources of information. Siemens's (2005) research revealed that, in

connectivism, knowledge is structured like a network. The learner must make a connection to

the most relevant source of information to learn. Another study conducted by Downes (2008)

observed that "at its heart, connectivism is the thesis that knowledge is distributed across a network of connections, and therefore that learning consists of the ability to construct and traverse those networks" (p. 6). Research by Siemens (2005) and Downes (2008) demonstrated the importance of society and the environment in foreign language learning.

Behaviorist, cognitivist, constructivist, and connectivist approaches embody the fundamental pillars of foreign language learning theories and present language learning activity as an internal mental process independent of social and cultural settings. However, further studies have demonstrated that a foreign language is better learned in a sociocultural context.

Social Interaction Perspectives on Foreign Language Learning

Exposure to input is crucial when learning a foreign language (Krashen, 1982). However, learning occurs only if the input received is comprehensible. Comprehensible input is defined as language feedback that can be comprehended by listeners, even if all the words in the feedback are not understandable (Krashen, 1982). According to Krashen (1982), a language learner does not need to master grammar rules to understand a comprehensible message. Therefore, social interactions that provide comprehensible input can help a novice to learn any foreign language before grammar rules are even introduced (Krashen, 1982).

Input gained from social interaction with people who are more proficient in the target language can increase the learners' vocabulary. According to Saito and Hanzawa (2018), when learning vocabulary alongside knowledgeable speakers, learners should not expect explicit instruction. Learning occurs implicitly as the learners make sense of what is heard from their interlocutors. Coyle, Reverte Prieto, and Martinez Rico (2017) undertook an empirical study to determine how social interaction could be beneficial for learners of English as a foreign language. Sixteen 10-year-old Spanish speakers, seven boys and nine girls, were pulled from

their regular classroom and paired with native English speakers for interaction through several activities. Over a 5-week period, the participants interacted to learn English. Participation in the research raised the learners' awareness of their need of improvement in vocabulary after 6 years of learning EFL. The researchers collected data over 8 weeks throughout multiple classroom activities including tests and written activities. The researchers administered Friedman's test to identify differences in treatments across the tests given (as cited in Hernandez, López-Presa, & Maldonado-Correa, 2016). All 16 learners confirmed in an interview that their vocabulary level had increased. Coyle et al. (2017) suggested the integration of socio-cultural methods of learning in the classroom to help students learn more effectively.

Benrabah (2019) researched the relationship between social interaction and language proficiency with regard to vocabulary development. The research employed an experimental design with a treatment and control group represented by 22 first-year EFL students in each group. The researcher placed the students in the experimental group within a native English-speaking community living in Algeria. The researcher used a triangulation method including t tests, questionnaires, and interviews to collect data. Unlike the participants in the control group, the EFL learners in the experimental group were exposed to intense comprehensible input. After months of interaction, the findings revealed the vocabulary acquisition level of students in the experimental group was comparable with the level of second-year language students. Benrabah (2019) concluded that social interaction can increase the vocabulary level of novice speakers. The research revealed the importance of comprehensible input in foreign language learning in Algeria.

Knowledge of vocabulary gained through learners' interaction with the target language environment is critical for understanding written materials (Steinlen, 2017). Individuals with

limited vocabulary may fail to develop abilities needed to advance in the learning process.

Hamid (2015) investigated the possibility of increasing EFL learners' vocabulary through social interaction. The study employed a pretest and posttest design method to determine the effect of social interaction on the achievement of non-native speakers of English after their interaction with native speakers. Using the cluster sampling technique, the researcher selected 50 students in grade 8 to participate in the research. Hamid (2015) equally divided the 50 learners between the experimental and control groups. The researcher gave the 25 learners in the experimental group multiple-choice questionnaires consisting of 10 items. The findings revealed that the posttest's mean score (61.6) in the experimental group was higher than the mean score of the posttest (56) in the control group. In addition, the standard deviation of the posttest in the control group (6.29) was smaller than the standard deviation of the posttest (8.94) in the experimental group. Hamid (2015) concluded that social interaction increases the vocabulary acquisition the of EFL learners.

Namaziandost, Gilakjani, and Hidayatullah (2020) investigated the effect of social interaction on the reading comprehension abilities of Iranian EFL learners. Eighty 16- to 18-year-old students from a language learning center took the Oxford Quick Placement Test (as cited in Wistner, Sakai, & Abe, 2009). Based upon the results, the researchers picked 50 learners, whose test scores (30 to 47 out of 60) were one standard deviation above and below the mean, to participate in the study. The researchers divided the selected students into two teams, the control and experimental groups, comprised of 25 students each. The selection followed a non-random sampling process. The researchers scheduled two sessions of interaction per week for a total of 10 weeks for the experimental group. After 10 weeks of interaction, the researchers analyzed the data using SPSS software. The results revealed that the reading comprehension

abilities of the students in the experimental group outperformed the learners in the control group. The findings showed that social interaction increases not only verbal skills but also reading and comprehension abilities (Shively, 2016).

Social interaction can improve learners' speaking skills when interacting with others in society. According to Mirzaei and Hayati (2018), the learner's speaking ability develops during conversations that take place in a natural setting with knowledgeable people. A study by Al Zoubi (2018) investigated the impact of extensive communication on the speaking abilities of the learners. The researcher randomly selected 42 EFL students from a Jordanian university and placed the students with native speakers of English. After months of interaction, the researcher gave each of the participants a set of questionnaires using a Likert scale. The findings revealed that the learners' frequent exposure to the English language significantly impacted their language acquisition. The correlation between extended social interaction and the improvement of the learner's speaking ability was statistically significant, with the p-value attaining 0.228. The findings demonstrated that social interactions should go beyond simple communication to include any shared activities like watching movies, chatting on the Internet, and listening to the radio.

Alshahrani (2016) researched the effect authentic communication with native speakers may have on the speaking abilities of EFL learners in Saudi Arabia. The study aimed at improving the speaking proficiency of EFL learners by engaging them in daily videoconference dialogues with native speakers. Alshahrani (2016) adopted a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design to examine improvement in the learners' speaking abilities over time. The researcher selected 36 adult male students from a local university and divided them between a control and an experimental group. The experimental group was comprised of 17 students while the control

group had 19 students. For 12 weeks, the students in both groups met once a week to improve their speaking skills. While the students in the experimental group met with native speakers via video conference, the learners in the control group met during a speaking course. Students in both groups engaged in dialogues about the same events and issues to ensure that the results were not biased. Using Sawaki's assessment scale, the researcher assessed speaking skills of the students in the experimental group during week 1 and 12 (as cited in Alshahrani, 2016). The researcher analyzed the data using t-test and descriptive statistics. The findings indicated improvement in the learners' speaking abilities (Alshahrani, 2016). The result of this research has suggested that interaction with native speakers can contribute to the improvement of speaking skills.

AlSaleem (2018) investigated the possibility of increasing English language learners' oral communication abilities through social interaction using social media. The researcher used a quasi-experimental design to estimate the causal impact of the intervention on 20 freshmen students selected from the English department of a university in Jordan. Students in the experimental group learned English by interacting with native speakers through Facebook while 20 other students in the control group received ESL instruction via a lecturer. AlSaleem (2018) created a pre-post speaking test to determine learners' mastery of oral communication skills. The results of the posttest revealed that students in the experimental group outperformed learners in the control group in terms of speaking skills. The difference between the control and the experimental group was significant at the 0.05 level (AlSaleem, 2018). The findings indicated that interaction with native speakers through social media increases learners' speaking abilities.

Peeters (2019) investigated the influence online peer interaction may have on the language proficiency of EFL learners. The research consisted of assessing the writing and

speaking abilities of two groups of students through a collaborative forum using Facebook. The participants were 231 students who were randomly selected from a Belgian university to participate in the project. As first-year EFL students and native speakers of Dutch, the participants faced speaking and writing challenges. Peeters (2019) hypothesized that, at the end of the project, the participants would return to university with a higher level of English proficiency than before. As such, the researcher set up a special collaboration account on Facebook where a first group of 119 participants and a second group of 112 members interacted for four months, 12 hours per month. In total, the participants exchanged 5,834 messages including written texts and voice messages. The researcher used the Graph API Explorer program to retrieve all messages. Peeters (2019) transferred the content of the messages to a Word page for analysis. The results of the analysis demonstrated that the students improved their both their speaking and writing proficiency. Peeters (2019) concluded that EFL learners can develop their language skills by interacting socially using computer-mediated communication tools.

Alzubi and Singh (2018) investigated socially oriented strategies for learning English as a foreign language. The population of the study involved 70 EFL students selected from a Saudi Arabian university using a purposive sampling method. The first half of the students formed the control group, and the second half formed the experimental group. During the first three weeks of the study, the researchers trained the participants in the experimental group on socially oriented strategies for learning English as a foreign language. The strategies involved participants' interaction with a local English-speaking community to practice the target language. The opportunity to interact with a local community provided insights into cultural and linguistic issues. Participants in the experimental group integrated with the local English-speaking

community to learn English for 12 weeks, whereas participants in the control group learned English in class. Using a pre-intervention and post-intervention survey method, the researchers collected data through a series of questions. The researchers administered the pre-intervention Likert scale-style questionnaire to both groups during the first week of the course, and the post-intervention survey was administered in the twelfth week to both the experimental and control group. Alzubi and Singh (2018) analyzed the data through SPSS and ensured the reliability of the questionnaires through factor analysis. The results showed that 87% of participants in the experimental group (M = 4.34, SD = .493) demonstrated language improvement compared with 64% in the control group (M = 3.20, SD = .381) (Alzubi & Singh, 2018). The findings of the study showed that socially oriented strategies promoted foreign language learning compared with formal in-class strategies.

Bensalem (2018) explored the advantages of social networking for foreign language learning. Using a pretest-posttest design, the researcher investigated whether formal learning in the classroom or learning through social networks was most likely to increase the learner's vocabulary in the target language. The participants in the study were comprised of 40 Arabic EFL students from a university in the Persian Gulf region. Bensalem (2018) randomly assigned 21 of the participants to the experimental group and 19 to the control group. The researcher allowed participants in both groups to independently study English for six weeks. After the learning period, the researcher collected data from the participants using a vocabulary test. The test was a blend of 40 multiple-choice and 10 fill-in-the-blank items. Each item of the test was rated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 with 1 being *strongly disagree* and 5 being *strongly agree*. To measure the participants' improvement in vocabulary, Bensalem (2018) administered the test first as pretest and next as a posttest. The researcher calculated the

reliability of the test using Cronbach's alpha, with a value estimated at .87. Bensalem (2018)

applied a *t* test to analyze the data gathered from the participants during the pretest and posttest.

The researcher set the *p*-value significance level at .05. Results showed that students in the

experimental group (*M* = 43.14, *SD* = 5.44) outperformed students in the control group (*M* =

21.21, *SD* = 8.60), *t*(38) = 4.30, *d* = 3.04 in the area of vocabulary learning. The experimental

group's score was significantly higher than the control group (*p* < .000) with a very large effect

size (*d* = 3.04) (Bensalem, 2018).

Social interaction is essential to foreign language learning. Through social interaction,

the learner receives input that fosters the development of the target language. However, input

may not always lead to learning (Bensalem, 2018). Krashen (2016) observed that foreign

language learners may benefit from comprehensible input and observing the rules of the target

language by interacting with the native speaker community. However, students may not be able

to use the language adequately unless they are knowledgeable enough about the rules of the

target culture. Recent research in foreign language learning demonstrated that language is not

only inseparable from culture but also useful for preparing the learner for intercultural

communication (Soomro & Mahesar, 2017).

Cultural Awareness Perspectives on Foreign Language Learning

While social interaction develops language skills, cultural awareness helps language

learners to better understand the history and mentality of new people (Mahmoodzadeh &

Khajavy, 2019). Cultural awareness sets the learners in conditions to be more receptive to skills

gained from interactions with people knowledgeable in the target language. According to

González-Becerra (2019), cultural curiosity is a crucial step toward building cultural awareness.

Through cultural curiosity, language learners can appreciate others' language while gaining new

perspectives.

A study by Gurning and Siregar (2017) investigated how cultural curiosity could help ELL students learn English. The objective of the study was to determine whether language aptitude depends on the cultural curiosity level of the learners. The researchers used a quantitative approach with quasi-experimental design to examine the behavior of 76 ELL students enrolled in 11th grade. The students formed two groups: the experimental group represented by 38 students who expressed high cultural curiosity and the control group characterized by 38 students with low curiosity. Gurning and Siregar (2017) defined cultural curiosity as students' desire to learn a language based on the interest expressed about the culture. The researchers used a 20-item Likert scale-style questionnaire to determine students' level of curiosity and a 40-item objective test for language improvement. Gurning and Siregar (2017) carried out the Likert scale-style questionnaire and objective test treatments twice a week for a duration of 90 minutes for both the control and treatment group. In analyzing the data, the researchers applied a two-way ANOVA at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. The results revealed that the language aptitude of learners with high cultural curiosity was higher than the language aptitude of students with low curiosity. The findings implied that culturally curious people learn a foreign language faster than learners who demonstrate low curiosity.

Similar to Gurning and Siregar (2017), Mahmoodzadeh and Khajavy (2019) researched the impact of cultural curiosity on foreign language learning and development. The study used a mixed-method triangulation designed to conceptualize Language Learning Curiosity (LLC), a new curiosity framework explaining how curiosity about a culture speeds up the language learning process. According to Mahmoodzadeh and Khajavy (2019), the LLC was a variable reflecting an inquiry-driven desire to learn a foreign language. The participants included 221

male and 113 female EFL learners, selected using a convenience sampling. The researchers collected the data using the Language Learning Curiosity Scale (LLCS), a 6-point Likert-type self-report questionnaire (Mahmoodzadeh & Khajavy, 2019). The result, which was significant ($p < 0.05$), revealed that the higher the curiosity level, the higher the willingness to learn English as a foreign language. The findings suggested that without cultural curiosity the learner may not be open to learning about others' culture and language (Mahmoodzadeh & Khajavy, 2019).

Cultural awareness also fosters intercultural sensitivity, which facilitates foreign language learning. Tuncel and Paker (2018) defined intercultural sensitivity as the acknowledgment of differences among cultures. Interculturally sensitive people are willing to learn the language associated with a culture. Su (2018) researched the importance of intercultural sensitivity in foreign language learning. The researcher wanted to understand whether intercultural sensitivity could positively impact ELF learners' attitudes toward the culture of the target language. Using a modified version of Chen and Starosta's (2000) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), Su (2018) collected data from 1,191 Taiwanese college students who were learners of English as a foreign language. The ISS measurement instrument tested four dependent variables: the students' level of engagement, confidence, enjoyment, and respect of cultural differences. The researcher used descriptive statistics to summarize the responses of the students. Using Pearson correlations, the researcher determined relationships among the variables and applied the means of each of the variables to measure the participants' intercultural sensitivity. The findings revealed that Taiwanese students' intercultural sensitivity promoted respect for cultural differences and encouraged the learning of English as a foreign language.

Çiloğlan and Bardakçi (2019) also researched the relationship between English language proficiency and intercultural sensitivity. Using a descriptive research design, the researchers

investigated the possibility students exhibiting a higher level of cultural sensitivity learn a foreign language faster than students with a low level of cultural sensitivity. Using the cluster sampling method, the participants were 120 female and 205 male EFL students, randomly selected from a state university. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 26 years and language learning proficiency level from elementary to intermediate. The researchers used Chen and Starosta's (2000) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), a 24-item Likert scale-style questionnaire, to collect data. To ensure validity of the results, Çiloğlan and Bardakçi (2019) used the SPSS program to check the normal distribution of the ISS scores and ANOVA to find the difference in the scores. With an alpha coefficient of .83, the internal consistency of the 24 items in the questionnaire was high, which ensured reliability. The results showed that the higher intercultural sensitivity scores, the greater English language proficiency of the students. The findings suggested that acceptance of cultural differences is a necessary condition to foreign language learning and proficiency.

Like cultural sensitivity, acculturation is another common, informal way of learning a foreign language. Hammer and Dewaele (2015) defined acculturation as the cultural modification of people who have had prolonged contact with a culture while trying to adapt to the culture. Under the acculturation learning model, the extent the learner uses and gets closer to the target language culture determines proficiency and success. Hammer and Dewaele (2015) researched strategies for learning a foreign language through acculturation. The researchers used a case study method to investigate the behavior of 149 Polish students who migrated to the United Kingdom. Mostly female, the participants moved to the United Kingdom as part of a life-choice decision. The average length of residency for most of the participants was eight years. Hammer and Dewaele (2015) gathered data on the participants' acculturation level by means of

interviews and surveys. The researchers used a one-way analysis of variance to analyze the data.
The findings revealed a significant effect ($p \leq .004$) of the participants' acculturation level on the
participants' self-perceived proficiency level in English. The findings suggested that
improvement in the target language depends on the learners' level of integration into the target
language community.

Aoyama and Takahashi (2020) explored the relationship between acculturation and
attainment in the target language. The study investigated how the language abilities of Japanese
students could improve if acculturated in the United States, the target language environment, for
one year. The participants were 88 Japanese international students conditionally admitted, due to
insufficient English proficiency, into a liberal arts college in the United States. The researchers
selected the participants based on scores from the Test of English as a Foreign Language.
Aoyama and Takahashi (2020) employed correlational research design and survey as data
collection methodology. The correlational design was used to help understand if the
acculturation and L2 attainment variables were related. Aoyama and Takahashi (2020) created
an index for each participant and variable and used a mediation analysis to facilitate
understanding of both variables. The researchers guaranteed the validity of each index by
determining the internal consistency of the questions using Cronbach's alpha. The application of
an additional validity tool, the Shapiro-Wilk test, helped test the normality of the data. The
results showed that there was a statistically significant correlation ($\beta = .33, p < .001$) between
acculturation (original variable) and English proficiency ($r = .52, p < .001$). The study suggested
that the target language is acquired to the degree to which the learners acculturate to the target
culture.

Cultural integration has the advantage of allowing people to value and learn from other

cultures. According to Van Niejenhuis et al. (2018), cultural integration is a form of knowledge exchange in which people borrow practices and traits from the target culture without losing their own. Van Niejenhuis et al. (2018) explored the possibilities of learning a language through cultural integration. The study targeted 163 international students who immigrated to the Netherlands for study purposes. The researchers wanted to know whether an increase in language proficiency is associated with an increase in cultural integration and positive attitudes toward the target language. Though the participants were enrolled in a psychology course, knowledge of the Dutch language was needed to ensure full integration in the Netherlands. The average mean age of participants was 23 years old, and the average time spent in the Netherlands was .42 years. Van Niejenhuis et al. (2018) collected data using questionnaires. The questionnaires were intended to measure the learners' proficiency at two different times during their integration in Dutch society. Three months separated time 1 (t1) from time 2 (t2). Findings from multiple regression analyses showed the participants' proficiency in Dutch improved at a statistically significant level ($t(162) = 9.65, p < .001$). The findings suggested that the higher the cultural integration, the more positive the change in language proficiency (Van Niejenhuis et al., 2018).

Perspectives on Foreign Language Learning Through Out-of-School Activities

Out of school programs abroad, such as foreign language learning programs abroad, are another avenue for increasing the language level of learners of English as a foreign language. Participation in these types of programs abroad can increase language abilities and develop competencies related to social interaction. A study by Makarova and Reva (2017) investigated the possibility of learning a foreign language outside of the school environment. The researchers considered a set of activities students should engage in during a language trip. The trip involved

119 university students enrolled in foreign language classes in four different universities. The language activities students completed during the trip offered the participants an opportunity to learn and earn transferable credits. The researchers used a questionnaire-based survey method to evaluate changes that occurred in the participants' learning abilities. Makarova and Reva (2017) collected data using open-ended, yes/no, and multiple-choice questions. The researchers analyzed the data by employing the key-word method, SPSS, and chi-square tests. The learners' self-reported general language skills improved by 72.9%. Over 86% of surveyed students confirmed having learned from the program and expressed interest in further participation. The results suggested that trips abroad represent additional opportunities for learning and practice, which are beneficial for cultural competence and language skills development.

Shively (2016) explored the advantages of an out-of-school learning program for foreign language learners. Using a case study method, Shively (2016) investigated changes in the language ability of a 21-year-old male native speaker of English who spent a semester in Spain to learn about the language and culture. The researcher placed the participant with a host family and a Spanish native speaker of the same age for interaction over 11 weeks. For data collection purposes, Shively (2016) provided the participant with an audio recorder to record 30 minutes of Spanish speaking interaction within a week. No recording was required for weeks 1 and 2, as during that period the participant was not expected to have learned enough for a change to occur. Under the researcher's recommendation, the participant recorded parts of conversations from weeks 3 to 11. Recordings of weeks 3, 6, 9, and 11 were parts of conversations held with the host family. However, recordings for weeks 5, 7, 10, and 12 involved parts of the conversation held with the native speaker peer. At the end of the experiment, using the content analysis method, the researcher transcribed and analyzed the recordings for any improvement in

pronunciation, lexis, morphology, and syntax. The results suggested that social interaction through language programs in an authentic environment offers an opportunity for foreign language enjoyment and development. Findings from the study revealed the dynamic nature of social interaction with a host family and native peers for language practice (Shively, 2016).

Additionally, studying abroad has become an option for improving language. Using a pretest-posttest design, Burns, Rubin, and Tarrant (2018) compared the benefits of on-campus and abroad language learning experiences. The study measured the changes in learners' linguistic capacities as the result of a 4-week on-campus and another 4-week abroad language practice. Participants involved 605 college students selected from a university in the US to learn Spanish as a foreign language both on-campus and abroad. Burns et al. (2018) collected data by having the participants complete a Likert-type scale questionnaire. The researchers asked participants to self-assess their language abilities for on-campus and abroad learning. The self-assessment took place before and after the participants' learning experience abroad and on-campus. The questionnaire consisted of 21 items reflecting the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching Foreign Languages) recommended communication skills for foreign language learners. Respondents rated their ability to demonstrate Spanish skills on a five-step scale, ranging from 1-5, with 1 meaning *not at all* and 5 *quite easily*. The Cronbach's alpha (α) of the pretest and posttest questionnaires was 0.96, indicating an internal consistency reliability. Burns et al. (2018) ran pairwise comparison *t* tests to assess contrasts of interest between sites (on-campus or abroad) and time testing (pretest or posttest). The results of the analysis were significant ($p < .001$) and indicated that participants' learning experience abroad was more beneficial in terms of foreign language learning compared to on-campus learning.

With the development of the concept of lingua franca, language between individuals

whose native languages are different, Llanes and Serrano (2017) researched the effectiveness of learning English through language immersion programs as compared to the school context. The researchers placed the participants, 46 adult Spanish students, with native English speakers in the UK and Ireland. After three months of interaction, the researcher assigned a speaking task to the participants. Using an interview data collection method, the researchers recorded the speech of each participant. Llanes and Serrano (2017) transcribed and coded the data using the computerized language analysis program by MacWhinney (2017). The multivariate analysis of covariance tests for the speaking assignment showed significant differences ($p < .001$) between learning English in and outside the classroom (F (5, 141) = 17.757). Wilks' lambda, which is used with a one-way multivariate analysis of variance, was used to test for any possible correlation between variables (Wilks' lambda = .614). Llanes and Serrano (2017) found that students who learned English through language immersion programs improved their speaking proficiency 13.12% faster than students who learned in the traditional school setting.

Language conversation clubs are also an effective way to practice the language outside of the classroom. Speaking clubs offer opportunities for frequent use of the language without fear of making a mistake. According to Suparman (2017), language clubs create supportive, encouraging, and student-centered atmospheres, giving more confidence to the learner. Suparman (2017) researched the effect of language clubs on the learners' speaking abilities. The researcher used a quasi-experimental design to estimate the causal impact of English conversation activities on 28 eighth graders representing the sample population. The participants took part in 10 out-of-class conversation meetings, one meeting per week, to practice English in groups. Suparman (2017) collected data on the participants' language proficiency by giving the participants a pretest and posttest. The researcher analyzed the pretest and posttest using

descriptive statistics. The mean score of the posttest, 9.25, was higher than the mean of the pretest, 7.21. The score of the t test was $t(27) = 11.68$ and was statistically significant ($p = .000$). Given the results of the analysis, English conversation clubs held outside of regular classes represented an alternative way for improving language speaking abilities.

Summary

This chapter has presented historical, social, and cultural perspectives on learning English as a foreign language. Historically, people learned foreign languages in a more formal context. This formal learning style falls under foreign language theories including behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and connectivism. However, cognitivist, constructivist, and connectivist approaches presented language learning activity as an internal mental process independent of social and cultural context. As global communication has increased in the modern world, learning strategies have taken a sociocultural dimension. The findings of this chapter have revealed that learners of English as a foreign language can rely on existing sociocultural strategies evolving outside of the school context. Although research on sociocultural dimensions of foreign language learning has increased, more studies are needed to make learning strategies accessible to a larger population.

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of former learners of English as a foreign language. The study provided an understanding of the socio-cultural dimension of learning English as a foreign language. Participants from various countries shared their experiences of how they learned English as a foreign language in a non-English-speaking culture. Participants provided reasons for obstacles they encountered, and solutions for solving the difficulties they faced while learning English in an environment where English is not the primary language. Subsequent information includes the strategies used by participants to learn English with few opportunities to practice using the English language. The shared experiences gave the study a unique perspective on existing strategies for successful foreign language learning outside of the target language environment. Chapter 3 presented the methodology of the phenomenological study underlying the research. The methodology sections include the research design, the data collection process and analysis, and measures of ethical considerations and trustworthiness.

Research Design

A phenomenological research model was used to understand the experiences of former learners of English as a foreign language. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenology is the study of the structures of experience. Phenomenology is the study of how individuals interpret and understand a social phenomenon through their lived experiences. As an

approach to qualitative research, phenomenology focuses on describing the essence of a phenomenon common to a group of people. Such a description is provided by the view of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. The goal of phenomenology is to explain the meaning that people give to the experienced phenomenon. The explanation of the meaning of such a phenomenon provides insights in what was experienced and how people experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Groenewald (2016) observed that choosing an appropriate design can help set the parameters for achieving research objectives. The choice of research design is determined by the research questions. The study used a phenomenological research design because it corresponded to the study of experiences, cultures, and social phenomena (Groenewald, 2016). A phenomenological research design provided a better description and interpretation of how each interviewee experienced the phenomenon of language learning in an environment where English was not the primary medium of communication. By understanding how people experienced the phenomenon of learning a foreign language, new meanings can occur to inform future learning strategies (Groenewald, 2016). A phenomenological research design was chosen for in-depth data collection, allowing a deep and detailed understanding of the phenomenon of learning English in an environment where English was not the primary language.

Context of the Study

After the selection of the design, consideration was given to the research context. According to Smagorinsky and Smith (2001), context refers to the circumstances that frame an event to be fully understood. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2017) recommended that researchers define and describe context to give form and meaning to research. A well-defined context provides the lenses through which the reader can appreciate the methodological approaches,

findings, and conclusions of the research. A clear context helps the audience to better understand the research study and purpose. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that the research context allows for the visualization of information relevant to the research problem and helps the researcher to orient readers and provide the basis for further conceptualization of the research data.

The purpose of the research study was to reveal the meanings that inform the phenomenon of learning English as a foreign language. The research activity took place in a context that allowed for the study of meanings and interpretations. Not only did the research setting encourage interviewees to speak openly, but it also allowed them to focus the conversation on areas they felt were important. The research setting also allowed for greater control over the data to be collected and permitted the research information to be gathered more quickly and efficiently.

The interview took place in a virtual environment during the fall of 2020 and involved five participants who learned English in their home countries. Four of the participants answered the interview phone calls within the United States, while one participant took part in the interview from abroad. Each of the participants learned English as a foreign language in a country where English was not the primary means of communication. Interviewees varied in terms of gender, age, occupation, and country of origin. A total of five countries where the participants' leaning took place were described, including Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Algeria, Togo, and Benin. Algeria is in the northern part of Africa while Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, and Benin are all located in West Africa. None of these countries is an English-speaking country. French is the dominant language of the countries where the interviewees learned English. Respondents first learned English in school as part of the curriculum in these countries.

Research Questions

The study participants, who are all former students of English as a Foreign Language, were invited to share their experiences and strategies on how they learned English. The following research questions guided the study.

(RQ1): What are the lived experiences of a student who learned English as a foreign language within a non-English speaking culture?

(RQ2): What are strategies for learning English as a foreign language within a non-English speaking culture?

Research Participants

According to Shahdadi and Rahnama (2018), the sampling plan for a phenomenological research study includes a sampling strategy, a decision on sample size, and a procedure for selecting participants. The study employed a criterion sampling strategy to ensure that the selected participants had the knowledge and experience required for the research. Ames, Glenton, and Lewin (2019) defined criterion sampling as a sampling technique involving the selection of subjects who can best inform the research questions and provide an understanding of the phenomenon under consideration. In contrast to random selection, criteria sampling is a deliberative selection strategy intended to produce rich information in accordance with the phenomenological approach (Glenton & Lewin, 2019). In the hope that the results would contribute to the richness of the data, participants were from various backgrounds, each having learned English in a different environment. Table 1 provides more information on the origins and diversity of the participants.

As part of the selection process, Creswell (2013) suggested "participants have [similar] experience of the phenomenon being studied" (p. 155). Thus, participants who had similar

experiences learning English in non-English-speaking foreign countries were selected. All

targeted participants agreed to participate in the interview.

In a phenomenological study, the sample size must also contribute to the acquisition of

information useful for understanding the depth of the message surrounding a phenomenon.

Smith et al. (2009) argued that a relatively small sample size can create a homogeneous set of

participants, allowing the researcher to examine divergences and convergences in some detail.

Creswell (2013) suggested interviewing 3 to 15 subjects, and Dukes (1984) suggested

interviewing 3 to 10 subjects. To increase the chances of studying each informant intensely,

Morse (1994) also recommended about six subjects. Consequently, the sample size was limited

to five participants who could provide the information necessary for a complete understanding of

the phenomenon under consideration. An email invitation (see Appendix C) was sent to each

participant to obtain consent (Creswell, 2013).

Table 1

Participants' Characteristics

Participant	Occupation Industry	Gender	Country of Learning
1	Financial Services	Male	Togo
2	Engineering	Male	Algeria
3	Education	Female	Benin
4	Human resources	Male	Cote d'Ivoire
5	Art	Female	Senegal

Role of Researcher

As qualitative research, phenomenology requires the researcher to act as the primary

mediator or instrument in the data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, data

were collected using criterion sampling and semi-structured interview questions. The chosen methods allowed for the selection of informants with first-hand knowledge of the phenomenon of learning English as a foreign language. Depending on the answers the informants provided, not all questions necessarily followed the same order as initially planned on the questionnaire (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One question was asked at a time, and sufficient time to listen to the responses of each informant was allowed before moving on to the next question. Flynn and Korcuska (2018) indicated that the researcher should use minimal probes to encourage respondents to elaborate on their thoughts. To this end, phrases including "What happened after..." or "Tell me about…" were used.

A subsequent key role involved the facilitation of the interview process through the establishment of excellent rapports with the participants. According to Deterding and Waters (2018), in-depth interviews require intense dialogue and negotiation with informants. As such, strong interpersonal relationships were established with the participants to ensure rich data collection. The relationships of trust and respect allowed participants to feel comfortable sharing their experiences. Dang, Westbrook, Njue, and Giordano (2017) argued that even the best-designed research fails in collecting rich data if the investigator does not consider building friendships at every stage of the process. Therefore, the interview protocol was flexible and user-friendly, allowing informants to share information deemed useful for the research study.

In this study, the interviewer shared the same characteristics with the participants, who were former learners of English as a foreign language. To avoid bias in the research, McWhorter (2019) advised researchers who had experienced the same phenomenon to bracket out any preconceived judgments on the same topic. Thus, as a former learner of English as a foreign language, the interviewer set aside all pre-determined knowledge to minimize bias to better

understand the perspectives of the participants. Bracketing prevented the distortion of the

information the participants had to share. As Moustakas (1994) suggested, the process of

bracketing helped maintain the authenticity of the interview while allowing the researcher to

understand the "underlying dynamics of the experience" (p. 135) of the interviewees.

Measures for Ethical Protection

As a participant-centered approach to research, phenomenological studies place

importance on ethical protection. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized the importance of

protections for human subjects and encouraged researchers to apply appropriate ethical

principles because of the extensive nature of the interview process. Accordingly, ethical

measures were considered from the recruitment of participants to the end of the data collection

process.

Informed Consent Form

Ethical protection began with a request for approval (see Appendix D) from the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Southeastern University. On the recommendation of the

IRB, a consent form (see Appendix B) was prepared and sent to each participant. The consent

form allowed participants to accept or refuse to participate in the study. Participants could

withdraw at any stage of the research without fearing consequences. All participants voluntarily

agreed to participate in the research study. Participants were given at least three days to read,

understand and sign the consent form, and to express any concerns they might have before the

interview date (Paul, 2017). Permission was obtained to record telephone interviews for

approximately 30 minutes.

Anonymization

The second stage of ethical protection consisted of anonymizing sensitive information from the participants. Saunders et al. (2015) defined anonymization as a confidentiality measure that conceals the identity of participants to prevent harm during and after the data collection process. According to Saunders et al. (2015), anonymization also has a methodological justification because concealment of identity serves as an ethical standard to ensure the authenticity of participants' statements. Although anonymization is important in phenomenological studies, Saunders et al. (2015) suggested the researcher be both protective and balanced, meaning the researcher's decision about what information to anonymize must be based on some balance between maintaining the integrity of the data and protecting the identity of participants. However, Münch, Grosselfinger, Krempel, Hebel, and Arens (2019) observed that excessive anonymization creates decontextualization or affects the meaning of content. Thus, while concealing sensitive information, information deemed relevant to convey the context and purpose of the research was revealed. The anonymization process also involved the use of pseudonyms to conceal participants' real names, place of birth, schools attended, and family affiliations, but revealed information about the country where participants learned English as a foreign language. However, when revealing information deemed important, the generalization strategy recommended by Saunders et al. (2015) was used. Thus, instead of providing information about the workplace of the participants, only the general industry was revealed.

Information Treatment

The final stage of ethical protection concerned the appropriateness of the processing and handling of data collected from participants. According to Ross, Iguchi, and Panicker (2018), the first strategy for ensuring that the researcher handles the data carefully is to protect the data

from unauthorized access. Münch et al. (2019) described the process as a measure of non-disclosure of participant information. To ensure that non-disclosure measures were applied, the research data were protected using a password and stored in a secure location to prevent unauthorized access. Subsequent measures to ensure the appropriate handling of research data included actions to ensure impartiality and neutrality during the interview process (Ross et al., 2018). Measures to ensure the appropriate handling of research data reduced suspicion and encouraged honest responses from the participants.

Methods to Address Validity and Reliability

In a phenomenological study, Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo, and Gonzalez (2018) recommended constructing meanings without compromising richness and dimensionality. The lived experience of the participants was investigated and interpreted from the perspectives of the participants. Errasti-Ibarrondo, Jordán, Díez-Del-Corral, and Arantzamendi (2018) recommended that the method of phenomenological research be as rigorous as any other method. Validity and reliability are key considerations when ensuring the rigor of a phenomenological study.

Validity

Before data collection, the interviewer stayed in contact with the participants to create familiarity. The strategy established a trusting relationship and assessed the informants' ability to provide honest and trustworthy information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To minimize bias and avoid tainting the authenticity and validity of the information collected from participants, the bracketing strategy was used (McWhorter, 2019).

Feedback from other individuals associated with the research, including the principal and secondary investigators, helped ensure internal validity. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985),

peer critique enhances the plausibility and acceptability of the results. At each stage of the process, the dissertation committee provided feedback, which improved the internal validity of the data and findings. Research participants also contributed to authenticating validity by reading and verifying the interview transcripts (Errasti-Ibarrondo et al., 2018). Each participant commented on the description and interpretation performed on the data.

Reliability

The quality of phenomenological research relies not only on validity but also on reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to the process as an external inquiry audit. The audit consisted of having the external investigator review each step of the research for accuracy and validation. Using the external auditor's comments, the research methodology and the implementation process were gradually updated. The contribution of the external auditor helped assess the effectiveness of the research process and ensured the consistency and reliability of the method that led to the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The final criterion for establishing research reliability is known as confirmability. Graham and Schuwerk (2016) suggested using an audit trail to establish the confirmability and trustworthiness of a qualitative study. The audit trail confirmed the research findings were based on the data (Graham & Schuwerk, 2016).

<center>**Data Collection Procedures**</center>

The first step in the data collection process was the scheduling of interviews. As suggested by Moser and Korstjens (2017), the participants were encouraged to be open to their thoughts and feelings (See Appendix A). To allow participants to provide in-depth answers, the interview guide consisted of "how" questions rather than "why" questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The final questions were intended to close the interview and give participants a feeling of

empowerment for sharing their thoughts (Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

As recommended by Moser and Korstjens (2017), the interview guide consisted of 10 open-ended, semi-structured questions that could be modified based on participants' responses to the original questions. The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed in-depth investigation. All participants felt comfortable sharing their experience of the phenomenon. The respondents were provided with a copy of the interview protocol for reference during the interview. The interviews were conducted by telephone and lasted approximately 30 minutes. As recommended by Creswell (2013), the telephone interview provided respondents with more flexibility, a comfortable environment, and time "to consider and respond to requests for information" (p. 159).

To capture all necessary information and ensure descriptive validity, a digital audio recorder was used as an additional data collection instrument. To ensure accuracy and authenticity, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and included the participant, corresponding pseudonym, and date. The transcripts were sent to the participants for verification of accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis

Creswell and Poth (2018) described a five-step spiral process that consists of "organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data and forming an interpretation of them" (p. 179).

Managing and Organizing Data

As suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018), the first activity in the analysis process was to manage and organize the data collected. At this stage of the analysis, data were organized into digital files. Since the database contained many files, a file naming system was used to search

and find any document needed in a timely manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The audio recordings were converted to digital files, while the transcripts and research notes were converted to Word format.

Reading and Memoing Emergent Ideas

Deterding and Waters (2018) warned that light and hasty scanning activities are not consistent memo preparation practices. Thus, the transcript was read three times before being divided into smaller parts for further understanding and analysis of the interview. The reading activity consisted of note writing in the margins of the transcript to identify emerging phrases, ideas, and concepts related to the research questions (Deterding & Waters, 2018). The note-taking activity helped gather ideas leading to the development of codes and themes. The main ideas and organizational concepts outlined in the memos were sorted according to the initial codes, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Sample Initial Codes from Each Selected Participant

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Learn English from friends	Practice English with native speakers	Most learning come out of the classroom	Speak English the most you can without using your mother tongue	Traveling abroad provide more speaking opportunities
Correct English from one another	Get help from a best speaker within the family	Out of classroom conversation groups are helpful	Attend conferences held in English from the internet	Participate in English clubs for practice
Practice English between friends	Ask for help right away	Knowledgeable family members are helpful for rehearsal	Any speaking opportunity is beneficial, and mistakes should not matter	Practice English with native speakers

Describing and Classifying Codes into Themes

After the data organization and memoing activity, the next step in the data analysis process was to describe and classify the codes into themes. Using the relevant data selection approach, also known as the lean coding approach, an initial list of 13 codes was developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The list of codes was expanded as the search and review of the database continued. Then, the resulting codes were combined into themes based on common ideas and characteristics identified through the coding process. The second codebook developed contained the following three themes: rationale for foreign language learning, learning challenges, and strategies for learning English as a foreign language.

Developing and Assessing Interpretations

The data were analyzed by identifying related codes and linking ideas to create themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each theme developed included a detailed description and meaningful statements from the transcripts. The broader meaning of the data beyond the codes and themes was considered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A model of the data displayed by themes used for interpretation is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Sample Codebook

Theme	Theme Description	Significant Statements
Strategies for learning English as a foreign language	Techniques and approaches that participants employed to learn English as a foreign language	"There need to be interaction with others to learn a language." "You should be open to other people to practice the language." "You should speak English with knowledgeable family members and friends to overcome the fear to make mistakes." "You need meaningful interactions with some resourceful people."

Representing and Visualizing the Data

The final phase of the data analysis spiral activities consisted of data representation and visualization. First, for each person learning English as a foreign language, the data were independently analyzed, the conclusions developed, and the results presented. Next, the data were compared and analyzed for all learners of English as a foreign language, and data were described using a narrative approach. The data collected from various participants provided a better understanding of the phenomenon of learning English as a foreign language.

Summary

Chapter III provided a detailed account of the methodological approach used in this phenomenological study. The study was designed to understand the lived experiences of former learners of English as a foreign language. Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection method. The strategies used to address ethical and human protection issues were described in detail. To report on the exploration of research questions and the construction of themes, an overview of the data analysis process was presented. An in-depth analysis of the research findings is presented in Chapter IV.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of former learners of English as a foreign language. The study examined the experiences former learners of English as a foreign language used to learn English in an environment where most people speak a language other than English. The data were examined through the lens of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to understand the importance of society and culture in foreign language learning. A qualitative approach permitted the exploration of the meanings, interpretations, and relationships as related to learning English as a foreign language. The phenomenological study provided an in-depth understanding of the experiences of learning English as learned in a non-English-speaking environment. The data collected through the interview method provided an in-depth description of the phenomena of English language learning. Chapter IV provides a descriptive and interpretive analysis of the data and presents the results.

Method of Data Collection

Using criteria sampling, five subjects who had experience in learning English as a foreign language in a non-English-speaking culture participated in this study through in-depth interviews. Each participant's interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Four of the participants were interviewed by phone calls within the United States, while one participated from abroad. Each participant learned English as a foreign language in a country where English is not the primary language of communication. To create a more balanced data source,

respondents varied in terms of gender, age, occupation, and country of origin. Five countries were represented, including Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Algeria, Togo, and Benin. The following questions guided the research.

(RQ1): What are the lived experiences of a student who learned English as a foreign language within a non-English speaking culture?

(RQ2): What are strategies for learning English as a foreign language within a non-English speaking culture?

The interview protocol, consisting of ten open-ended questions, guided each interview session (See Appendix A). All interviews were recorded and transcribed from a digital recording application, Otter AI. Each participant validated his or her transcript for accuracy.

Findings

After each participant validated the interview transcript, data analysis commenced.   The interviews were organized into a single file for easy access and retrieval. To ensure full understanding, each transcript was read three times. Using the lean coding approach, an initial list of 13 codes was developed and expanded as the research and database review progressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through the data analysis process, themes emerged based on ideas represented by significant phrases and words in the interviews. A second codebook helped organize substantive data to address the research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of a student who learned English as a foreign language within a non-English speaking culture?

Interview data indicated participants chose to learn English as a foreign language due to the benefits and advantages related to the English language. Participants were aware that learning a foreign language can have a positive impact on their future lives. Participant 4 said,

45

"Before I started to study English, I had my own ambition." Some participants recognized that learning English was useful for their future careers. Participants shared that learning English can open new career opportunities in the international system. Participant 5 said, "I chose English because I was planning to have an international career after my studies." Working for an international company was part of the dream of Participant 2 who said that "many international companies need employees" who can communicate across borders and cultures. Participant 5 stated that his "ambition one is to work abroad in an international environment." The reasons given by Participant 4 are confirmed by Participant 2, who said, "I had to work with many foreign companies, very large companies like Japanese and American companies; I really wanted to get to a better position." According to Participants 1 and 2, English came into their lives because they believed that learning a foreign language could open international career opportunities for them.

In addition to work-related reasons, some participants mentioned reasons associated with the education system. Participants noted that in a non-English-speaking country, learning English is always essential as recommended by their department of education. Participant 3 stated: "I started learning English because in the country where I was born, English is part of the national curriculum." The foreign languages that participants had to learn were languages with an international dimension such as English, Spanish, and German. Participant 5 said, "…in Senegal, everyone speaks French as their first foreign language, but then, when you get to college, you have to choose another foreign language, which is usually English, German, or Spanish." Some participants acknowledged that they might not have learned English if English was not a national decision. Participant 3 said, "Everyone studies English from middle school to the final year of high school because English was compulsory." Participant 5 confirmed the

same information by stating that all school-age children must learn English as part of their academic path. Participant 5 said, "I didn't choose to learn English myself in the beginning. In Senegal, everyone who goes to school is supposed to learn English, sometimes even before starting formal school. That's how English came into my life; and today it has become like something inseparable from me."

Participants shared their experiences on how they proceeded to learn English in a non-English-speaking environment. They all identified French as the dominant language in the country where they learned English. All participants confirmed that they experienced difficulties learning English in an environment where school was the only setting for learning foreign languages. Participants noted that they had little opportunity to use the language in the school setting. Participant 3 said, "It was difficult because no one around me spoke the language." For Participant 1, the difficulty was explained by the fact that "learning was only about grammar and pronunciation of words." Participant 2 described this way of learning as monotonous, saying, "I've been learning irregular verbs and grammar for seven years." Participants felt that they were not learning English properly due to insufficient opportunities for practice. Participant 3 noted, "If memory serves me right, my English was horrible when I was in school because there was no emphasis on oral communication."

Participants indicated that although they began learning English in school, they improved their language skills outside the classroom. Participants reported receiving help from friends and relatives outside of regular classes. Participant 5 said that she received help from her native speaker friend whose "parents are British." Participant 5 added, "She helped me to adapt to this environment where everyone spoke a different language than English." Participant 3 also reported receiving help from her mother and friends with whom she worked in a group after

school "to practice together." Participant 4 confirmed that he relied on frequent talks with friends to his improve his English. Participant 4 said, "On Saturdays and Sundays, we speak English with friends all day long" and "that is what helped us improve our language skills." However, Participant 2 recognized that his colleagues helped him improve his English when he started to work. Participant 2 said, "I worked with British petroleum, and the people there helped me to learn a little bit more compared to what I learned in school."

Some participants mentioned difficulties related to the teaching method used in schools. Participants shared that the teaching method was not student centered and did not provide opportunities for students' interaction. Participant 3 mentioned that her English teacher did not allow the students to practice the language sufficiently to enable them to become fluent in it. Participant 3 said, "The difficulties we encountered were due to the teacher and his teaching method." Participant 1 also stated that "speaking was the most difficult" because "learners were not exposed to the language enough." Like speaking, listening was problematic for participants. Participant 2 explained that "insufficient exposure" to the language resulted in listening and comprehension problems. Participants felt dissatisfied with the teaching methods in place in their respective countries. Participant 5 stated that "the teaching method was outdated." For Participant 1 difficulties were also caused by the fact "students had many foreign languages to learn at the same time." However, Participant 5 experienced fewer problems at school than the other participants. Participant 5 said, "I think I was lucky because my parents and closest friends already spoke English."

According to participants, difficulties in learning English were also encountered due to the lack of adequate resources such as classroom libraries, literacy workstations, and word walls. As revealed by some participants, the school did not provide learners with the learning materials

needed to enable them to strengthen their language skills after class. Some participants attributed the scarcity of the learning materials to insufficient financial means. Participant 4 shared, "I will tell you that we are an underdeveloped country, and it is not easy for students to have the school supplies needed." Participants felt that adequate help and resources to improve their English could only be found outside the classroom. Participant 3 said, "If I remember correctly, it was outside the classroom that I found the help I needed." Participant 4 also said, "We need to look outside the classroom to find other ways to learn." Participants recognized that students needed resources, including books and computers, to learn independently after class, but these resources were not available. For example, Participant 4 said, "With no computer, it was difficult to get the right information." Most participants thought that they encountered some obstacles during their learning experience.

However, participants shared that all the difficulties they encountered did not prevent them from continuing to learn English. As many participants indicated, neither insufficient resources nor the teaching method prevented their desire to succeed in English. Participant 2 said, "we did not give up" because "we were prepared" knowing the importance of English. Participants understood the term "preparation" as a willingness to look for other ways outside of school to improve their English. Participant 4 said, "to overcome these difficulties, I used other means." Each participant understood the need to think of personal paths that could lead to an improvement in their language ability. As a response to the weaknesses in the school strategies, Participant 5 said, "I had my own learning methods."

Outside of class, participants reported receiving help from different sources, including friends, family, and anyone else who could speak English. All participants confirmed that they received assistance from their classmates, with whom they often worked after school.

Participant 5 said, "I have to say that the contribution of my classmates and that of my friend Nadia helped me to fill the gap." Participants confirmed that their friends helped them succeed by helping them engage in daily practice using the English language. Participant 1 said, "Outside the classroom, with our friends, we practiced speaking English and that is how we learned." According to participants, the partners they practiced speaking with were, in most cases, their school friends. Participant 5 noted, "We had a study group that was actually a group of friends" comprised of friends and classmates living in the neighborhood. Sometimes knowledgeable family members would help the participants. Participant 3 said, "Working and engaging in frequent conversations with family members allowed me to develop speaking abilities." Participants also found opportunities to practice speaking English with native speakers from neighboring English-speaking countries. Participant 4 explained: "I was also in contact with other students from other countries such as Ghana and Nigeria." All the participants recognized that assistance received from outside the classroom was effective in learning English as a foreign language.

Research Question 2: What are strategies for learning English as a foreign language within a non-English speaking culture?

Participants reported using several strategies when learning English as a foreign language. All the participants shared that they employed personal strategies with friends and family members to improve their language skills. Participant 4 mentioned a "rule" that he and his friends established, which consisted of "speaking English all day long" otherwise "a fine" was imposed on anyone using another language. Some participants felt that they understood the grammar rules better when the explanation came from a friend rather than the teacher. Participant 3 said, "One of us would explain it [grammar rule] again in his own words" when she

would get together with friends after class to practice English. According to some participants, sometimes, help among friends took the form of a winning game. Participant 5 said that she learned from her classmate and that her classmate also learned from her. Participant 3 explained that she reviewed her lessons with her mother before going to class every morning.

According to the participants, the help they received came either from a family member, a school friend, or from a native speaker. Participant 4 said that he "did not miss any opportunity to communicate with people from English speaking countries" he met. The participants shared that by joining English clubs, they were able to easily meet people with the goal to learn a new language. Participant 5 explained: "In my school, as in many others, we had an English club and I never failed to participate in the activities of that club." Participants emphasized that to improve their language abilities, they joined an English club or any other group where English was used. Participant 5 explained: "I used to participate in club cultural activities where English was the focus." On the other hand, Participant 4 found the internet to be an excellent resource for making new friendships and learning from knowledgeable people abroad. Participants reported attempting to be in contact with anyone with whom they could practice speaking English. Participant 5 said, "I met people, whether friends, relatives, or anyone else, who could speak English," and Participant 2 confirmed that he would be "with anyone who is willing to help."

For participants, learning a new language is also a commitment that requires learners to be open to others. Participant 2 emphasized the need of others in the learning process by stating that "it is important to open up to others to learn in return." Participant 3 shared that learning English as a foreign language requires the learner to "interact with others" and "engage in conversational exchanges." All participants agreed that the best learning strategy is to approach

others to create learning opportunities. Participant 2 shared that "the best strategy to learn is to try be around someone who is available to provide help." According to all the participants, to learn English, one must find people with whom they can communicate. Participants felt that opportunities may not come by themselves. Therefore, the learner must create them. For example, Participant 5 said, "Sometimes the opportunity may be almost non-existent, but you always have to create it because, just like you who need to learn a foreign language, there may be other people who also want to learn the same language." Participants stressed the importance of creating opportunities to practice languages with knowledgeable people. Participant 3 stated, "It is crucial to talk with people who can help you learn English." To ensure that the learner speaks with resourceful people, Participant 4 recommended that learners "have friends in English-speaking countries."

The participants felt that once contacts are established with resourceful people, the learner should make effective use of the existing opportunities. All participants acknowledged that they would not speak English if they did not use the language often. Participants indicated that learning English requires commitment. Participant 2 stated, "You want to learn English, be prepared to use the language often." Participant 4 also emphasized that learning a foreign language means being able to "use it sufficiently at all times with people who are not only available but also knowledgeable." Participant 5 said, "whether with friends, relatives, or anyone else who can speak English, this was a good opportunity for me to practice English and it was my strategy." For Participant 4, the strategy was to set a goal to "speak English and nothing but English all the time." However, some participants observed that practicing English among friends was the most beneficial to them. Participant 2 stated, "Practice among friends is more useful because among friends, if you make a mistake, you can correct each other, and it makes

you feel more comfortable to talk." All participants felt they would never have been able to speak English if they had not committed to language practice. Participant 5 confirmed this by saying, "There is no magic. You have to practice, practice, and practice."

Although some strategies worked well, all the participants recognized that other strategies did not produce the desired results. While participants unanimously acknowledged the effectiveness of many strategies employed outside the classroom, they did not think the classroom strategies were helpful. Participant 3 highlighted the ineffectiveness of teaching English through lecture by stating that "teaching by lecturing did not work for me." Participant 5 said, "We were not engaged in any form of oral communication and practice. I don't think many students liked that teaching method."

According to participants, many students continued to have speaking problems despite daily classes they attended at school. Participant 2 emphasized a lack of progress: "I was in a school where many students were in the same situation; they could not speak English." Other participants shared that teaching that relied on the textbook only created a form of monotony, which caused many students to lose interest in the learning material. Participant 5 stated, "There was a lack of interesting activities that captivated us, and everything was like programmed and static. I don't think this is the right way to teach." Participants reported searching for help outside the classroom due to unreliable teaching methods and strategies. Participant 3 said, "I had to rely heavily on resources outside the classroom."

Despite the inadequacies of school-based strategies, participants recognized that classroom instruction has had a role to play in learning English. Although classroom instruction remained less effective than learning acquired outside the classroom, the participants felt that classroom education was the foundation of language learning dynamics. Participants called for

an improvement in the strategies used by language teachers in schools. Participant 3 encouraged variation in classroom strategies in the following terms: "The problem was that there weren't many choices and options in the school." Participants also thought that foreign language teachers should go beyond strategies that includes language translation, lecture, and worksheet completion. Participant 2 said, "The teacher wanted the students to buy a French-English dictionary to do everything; I'm not sure that this strategy worked [laugh]." Unless the classroom strategies improve, participants felt that all those who would like to become proficient in English need to find additional learning strategies outside the classroom. Participant 5 said, "The strategy used in class was not the best one because it was not oriented to students' interaction."

All participants felt their English would not have improved without the contribution of their friends and family members. Participant 1 acknowledged, "Learning English among friends was easy because making mistakes in front of them was not something dishonorable." Participant 5 clarified, "We liked to speak English among friends; there is no shame in that." Most participants enjoyed studying and learning from their friends. Participant 1 said, "With friends, we practiced together and did group work." Participant 5 explained that he "formed a dynamic group" with his friends with whom he learned English. Participants indicated that they were able to improve their English language skills thanks to the contributions of their friends. Participant 4 said, "I think the contribution I received from some of my friends was helpful." As the participants noted, the collaboration among friends produced results they are proud of today. Participant 3 said, "By the way, a friend of mine now lives in the United Kingdom, and I live in the United States" and "we were all able to reach a very good level." Participant 5 shared: "I

think my friends, especially my classmates, have also played a very, very important role in my English learning" and "almost all of them have reached a higher level."

Some participants, however, indicated that they benefited more from the contributions of their family members. Knowledgeable family members contributed to participants' learning by speaking to them in English or helping them complete their schoolwork. Participant 3 recognized that she learned English alongside her mother who used to assist her with anything she did not understand in class. Participant 5, who was fortunate enough to have parents living in an English-speaking country, acknowledged that she learned a lot from them. Participant 5 explained:

> It must be said that my parents also contributed a lot to my success in English. I didn't miss the opportunity to call my parents in the United States and communicate with them; and I liked to do it in English; it often made me laugh because I didn't always use words they could understand, but for me, it was a way of learning and so it helped me, I think.

According to other participants, family members who do not know English helped in other ways, including offering books, gifts, money, or moral support. Participant 3 said his parents bought him English books in neighboring countries including Ghana and Nigeria to help him improve his English. Participant 4 also explained that his parents often gave him "money to buy school supplies" that he needed to continue learning. Participant 5 added, "My parents bought me the gifts I wanted every time I passed my English class." All participants acknowledged and appreciated the help they received from friends and family members.

Themes

Theme building followed Creswell and Poth's (2018) inductive-deductive logic process. Transcript data were first organized inductively into units of information. During the process,

the database was searched several times until the establishment of a comprehensive set of themes. Next, deductive thinking was used to build themes that were frequently being checked against the transcript data. Three themes, including detailed descriptions, emerged from the process (See Table 4).

Table 4

Theme Descriptions

Theme	Description
Rationale for foreign language learning	Reasons that brought participants to learn English as a foreign language
Learning challenges	Difficulties that participants encountered while learning English as a foreign language
Strategies for learning English as a foreign language	Techniques and approaches that participants employed to learn English as a foreign language

Theme 1: Rationale for foreign language learning

Participants cited several reasons for learning English as a foreign language. Participants acknowledged that they learned English because English is a compulsory subject in the national education system of their countries of origin. Participant 1 said, "We started learning English at school." Participant 5 added, "English is a discipline imposed by the school system here in Senegal." From middle school on, the participants acknowledged that they took English as a foreign language. Participant 3 said, "I started learning English in the sixth grade, which is equivalent to middle school in the education system of Benin." Participants felt that they first learned English as a condition for their academic advancement. Participant 2 stated that "English was compulsory for everyone." According to Participant 3, "Everyone studies English

from middle school to the last year of high school." Participant 5 stated that learning English in Senegal is a governmental decision meaning that "Everyone who goes to school is expected to learn English, sometimes even at a younger age."

Participants acknowledged that they did not stop after starting English in middle school. Participants admitted that they continued to learn English after realizing its importance as an international language. Participant 1 said, "English is the most widely spoken international language and that is why I decided to learn English as a foreign language." All participants felt that it was important to learn English because many people from all over the world use English. Participant 3 said, "I knew that English was important because it is a language that you want to know when you travel abroad." Aware of its importance, many participants decided to take English courses outside of the general education they had received in middle school. Participant 5 shared, "They [the parents] enrolled me in private classes that I took after regular classes so that I could speak and write English before I came here to the United States." Participant 4 said, "I studied English in the English Department at Cocody University. I received my master's degree in 2002." Participant 3 acknowledged that she took the TOEFL test to continue studying English in college.

Participants attributed their motivation for learning English to their desire to increase their chances of finding a job. Participants recognized that, as an international language, English is likely to increase their chances of getting a job abroad. Participant 5 said, "Almost everyone dreams of working internationally." Like her parents, who were able to find employment in the United States because of their knowledge of English, Participant 5 expected to find international employment if her language level improved. Participant 3 also acknowledged that she learned English because she thought that "learning English would help her" to "easily find a job in a

good company." Participant 4 added that her knowledge of English helped her find a job after her training at the CESAC business school in Senegal. Participant 2 felt that English could help him realize his dream of working for an international company. Participants felt that learning a foreign language could facilitate their socio-professional integration. Participant 2 said, "I really wanted to work for American or British companies, so I ... learn English," which he did by working as a mechanical engineer in an American oil and gas company in Nigeria.

Participants enthusiastically shared all the information and details about why they were interested in learning English. Participants felt that they made the right choice by learning English, which helped change their lives positively. Participant 4 shared that he was honored to be associated with major events in his home country because he used to serve as interpreter or translator during the most important international events held in Côte d'Ivoire. The participants felt that the meaning and importance they attached to English motivated them during their learning time. Participants were delighted and eager to share their life experiences because of the importance they attach to English as a foreign language. Participants did not seem to forget any details of their English learning experience, which is now part of their lives and history. Participant 3 said, "Today, English did me a lot of good." Participant 2 proudly shared that, unlike many other Algerians, he can now use English effectively. Participant 2 said, "When my friends send me SMS messages, they do it in French, but I reply to them in English."

Theme 2: Learning Challenges

Participants also shared several challenges they faced during their learning experience. Being in a non-English-speaking environment, participants felt that they tended to use their native language rather than the target language. Participant 2 explained that they "tended to use Arabic" at the expense of English when they were in small groups. Participant 3 reported

overuse of French and Ewe, her mother tongue, to communicate with friends in Benin. For

Participant 5, Wolof and French were the dominant languages spoken in Senegal, where she

began learning English as a foreign language. Participant 2 explained that he spoke Tenasia, his

native language, in addition to French, the administrative language. Participant 2 continued, "It

was difficult because no one spoke English; everyone spoke French and all the other languages."

Participant 3 said that "it was difficult" because nobody around her spoke English. Most

participants felt that their native language affected their efforts and willingness to maintain their

conversation in English. Participant 5 said, "In my case, it was not easy to learn English in

Senegal when many people speak French and Wolof." Participants felt that they tended to

overuse their native language since they were sometimes unable to find the appropriate words

and phrases to express their thoughts in English while in a non-English speaking environment.

Participant 3 observed, "The television is in French. Everything is in French."

Participants indicated that the tendency to overuse their mother tongue impacted their

ability to speak and listen in the target language. Participant 3 felt that they were unable to speak

clearly and understand native speakers without difficulty. For Participant 5, the speaking and

listening difficulties they encountered may be related to the fact that they were taught by non-

native teachers with an "accent" that they "didn't like." Participant 4 said, "At first it was hard to

listen to native speakers, and when you talk to them, they may not understand you either."

Listening and speaking difficulties confused participants, which could have caused them to drop

out of English classes. Participant 2 said, "It's really confusing. Ninety-nine percent of the

words they [native speakers] were using sound like words I know," but "I didn't even know it

was that word because of the way they pronounced it." Most participants felt that lack of

exposure to the English language hindered their ability to speak and listen. Participant 1

explained that "speaking was the most difficult" because, as students, they "weren't exposed to the language enough." Participant 2 noted that "speaking was difficult" because they "did not learn to communicate in English at school."

Participants felt that their communication skills could have been improved if their teachers had used effective teaching methods. Participant 2 said, "You know, every year you just study irregular verbs" and "it didn't help." Participants blamed their teachers for most of the difficulties they encountered in learning English as a foreign language. Participant 3 shared that "the teaching strategy was direct instruction," which did not work. Participant 1 laughed at his teacher's method, which was based on "frequent use of the textbook," a French-English dictionary, and "word memorization." The participants felt that the teacher did not vary the learning materials and strategies. Participant 3 shared, "I don't remember doing anything visual." Participant 5 noted that "everything was based on the textbook and activity book" and "there was not too much interaction between students." Participant 5 "would prefer more interaction between students." Participants expressed frustration at feeling compelled to learn English under difficult and unproductive conditions. Participant 3 expressed her disappointment by saying, "I didn't really get any help from the teacher."

Theme 3: Strategies for Learning English as a Foreign Language

Participants felt that immersion was an effective strategy for learning English as a foreign language. Many participants shared that immersion activities allowed them to learn alongside native speakers while interacting with them using English. Participant 2 stated that he traveled to Nigeria to interact with native speakers to improve. Participant 1 said, "My interaction with the native speakers helped me a lot to overcome the difficulties we encountered." Most of the participants felt that fluency in English at the native level develops from an extended stay in an

authentic learning environment. Participant 3, who studied British English, acknowledged that she would not have been able to "speak fluently" if she had not "benefited from a stay abroad" in an immersive environment. Participants also shared that it was more effective to learn English from a native speaker than to learn from people who are proficient in the language in an academic setting. Participant 3 explained that she decided to immerse herself in the native speaker community because her English teacher was a French speaker and not an English native speaker. All participants recognized that having a native speaker friend was crucial to learning English as a foreign language.

Participants shared that immersion in an English-speaking community allowed them to improve their accent. Participants recognized that using the appropriate accent is useful for native speakers to understand them and vice versa. As a result, Participant 1 spent time with English speakers from other countries to become accustomed to the appropriate English accent. Participant 2 recognized that a proper accent is necessary to "work with large international companies" where English is spoken. Participant 4 felt that when learning with students "…from other English-speaking countries," his English accent improved. According to the participants, knowledge of English and the right accent is essential when traveling to an English-speaking country. Participant 5 thought that an appropriate English accent could help him integrate into American culture and society once he had the opportunity to immigrate to the United States with his parents. Participants recognized that knowledge of a foreign language requires an understanding of the culture related to that language. Participant 2 stated, "It was only when I was in Nigeria that I learned to communicate more confidently." All participants acknowledged that they learned alongside native English speakers and their culture before they were able to learn English.

Participants also reported that their language skills improved by joining an English club. Participants felt that a language club could bring together more talented people who are already dedicated to learning a foreign language, thereby increasing the chances of improving their English. Participant 1 said, "We would meet in clubs to talk to each other ... so that we can express ourselves better." Participants shared that English clubs were an extension of the regular classroom. However, compared to the classroom, language clubs provide a more relaxed setting for learning English, as stated by Participant 1. Therefore, participants expressed their love and commitment to participating in English clubs. Participant 5 said, "I have never failed to take part in the activities of our English club." Participant 2 said that the English clubs were "a good place" where he "found help" to improve his English. All participants agreed that some "meaningful interaction" through language clubs was necessary for effective English language learning, as stated by Participant 3.

Participants felt that language study groups were also an essential part of the English learning process. Participants recognized that working in a study group allowed them not only to have conversations in English but also to do classwork that they would not have been able to do individually. Participant 3 said, "In a study group, we would be working in the textbook." Participant 2 shared that sometimes he and his friends "studied in groups to help each other with homework." Participant 5 affirmed, "I really enjoyed working in a group with my classmates the work that the teacher gave in class." For the participants, the English study groups were an essential team interaction and learning opportunity for people who cannot find family support. Participant 2 stated that study groups can help "even if someone doesn't have family or friends" for interaction and learning. Participants also felt that the study groups allowed them to be independent learners capable of taking charge of their studies. Participant 4 shared, "We work in

groups, sometimes on Saturdays or Sundays." Participants felt that anyone wishing to learn

English must be an "active member of a learning community [study group]," as stated by

Participant 3.

Participants shared the importance of help they received from their friends when learning

English as a foreign language. Participants indicated that by interacting with their friends, they

would set learning goals to achieve. Participant 2 said that setting "ambitious goals" gave him

direction and motivated him to learn English as a foreign language. In setting language goals,

Participant 1 reported that he "prepared a list of new words" that he would practice when

communicating with his friends throughout the day. Participant 3 set reading goals by sharing

"novels and other reading books" with her friends with whom she then "discussed" the content.

Participants felt that setting language goals was a crucial strategy for successful foreign language

learning. However, for goals to be effective, participants recognized that they must be

accompanied by rules. Participant 4 stated, "We impose English as the language to be spoken

throughout the day" and "every time someone uses a language other than English, that person

pays a fine." Participants felt that using English with friends who also need to learn English was

an effective strategy because everyone benefits from learning from each other. Participant 2

said, "English helped me and helped them [friends]."

Participants also recognized the contribution of family members in learning English as a

foreign language. Participants shared that if learners live with family members who are

knowledgeable in the target language, constant interaction can improve their language skills.

Participant 2 noted that learners should seize the opportunity if they are "lucky enough to have

people around who are willing to help them." Participant 5 said that he "learned to speak

English by approaching family members" who "were available." Participants shared that

learning with family members helped them minimize their "fear of making mistakes," as Participant 2 indicated. Participant 4 observed that for fear of making mistakes "some people are ashamed to speak English in front of other people." As a result, participants indicated that much of their learning was done with knowledgeable family members. Participant 3 shared, "the first help I received was from my mother, who studied English herself." Participant 4 said, "Sometimes I practice speaking with one of my sisters who studied in Ghana." The contribution of knowledgeable family members was also to explain the language rules to the learners. Participant 2 said, "She [his wife] gave me more details about the language rule; it was the key to my learning." All participants felt that having a knowledgeable family member was a useful way to gain practical experience in the target language.

Summary

This chapter showed data from interviews with five participants regarding their English language learning experiences and strategies. Participants reported that their learning experiences and strategies focused on socio-cultural interaction. Consistent use of English with school friends, family members, and other skilled individuals, including native speakers, characterized most of the experiences and strategies that participants used to succeed. Although participants recognized the importance of the basic instruction they received in their respective schools, all participants felt that advanced English proficiency required social interaction outside the classroom. Three themes related to foreign language learning experiences emerged: rationale for foreign language learning, learning challenges, and strategies for learning English as a foreign language. Based on the results, Chapter V will discuss the findings, examine the implications suggested by the study, and make recommendations for further research.

V. DISCUSSION

This phenomenological research study was designed to investigate and understand the lived experiences of former learners of English as a foreign language. According to Oxford (2016), effective language learners rely on various strategies for improvement in the target foreign language. Thus, the study examined the strategies that former learners of English as a foreign language used to learn English in an environment where most people speak a language other than English. In the linguistic self-confidence theory, Noels et al. (1996) suggested that foreign language learning is the result of a collaboration between the learner and the social milieu. However, few research studies have investigated foreign language learning strategies in a social milieu outside of the classroom. The goal of this phenomenological research study was to identify the socio-cultural dimension of learning English as a foreign language. Chapter 5 provides meanings to the results by interpreting the findings and their application to the research questions.

Method of Data Collection

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to identify the socio-cultural dimension of learning English as a foreign language. Using criterion sampling, five participants who have experience in learning English as a foreign language in a non-English-speaking culture were selected (Dukes, 1984). To address the research questions, data were collected via in-depth interviews with the five participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each interview was conducted

over the telephone and lasted for approximately 30 minutes. The five participants consisted of three male and two female adults, with the youngest being 19 and the oldest 47 years old. Participants were from various industries including financial services, engineering, education, human resources, and arts. Each participant learned English as a foreign language in a country where English is not the primary means of communication. Five countries or learning environments were involved, including Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Algeria, Togo, and Benin. None of these countries is an English-speaking country.

The interview protocol, consisting of ten open-ended questions, guided each interview session. To ensure descriptive validity, the interview was recorded using a digital tape recorder. Following each recording, the audio file was transcribed and shared with each participant for verification and accuracy. Using their editing rights, each participant verified the accuracy of the transcripts by making the corrections needed. The data were analyzed after validation of the transcripts by each participant. The transcript was read three times before being divided into smaller parts for further understanding and analysis. During the reading activity, notes were taken in the margins of the transcript to identify emerging phrases, ideas, and concepts related to the research questions (Deterding & Waters, 2018). The resulting codes were combined into themes based on common ideas and characteristics identified through the coding process. The codebook contained the following three themes: rationale for foreign language learning, learning challenges, and strategies for learning English as a foreign language.

Summary of Results

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory (SCT) of human learning provided a theoretical framework for this research study. Using the SCT, Vygotsky placed a considerable emphasis on culture and social interactions regarding the development of language learning. The SCT views

language learning as a socially mediated process in which humans acquire learning strategies and cultural beliefs through collaborative conversations with more knowledgeable individuals in society (Vygotsky, 1978). According to the SCT, language learning develops within a zone of proximal development (ZPD), interpreted as the distance between what language learners can do without help and what they can do with collaboration and support of more knowledgeable members of society. The SCT indicates that language-related problem-solving skills develop as the learners increase their interaction with more experienced people (Vygotsky, 1978).

The present study focused on the fundamental role social interaction played in the acquisition of English as a foreign language by former students living in non-English speaking countries. Study data indicated learners' interaction with friends, family members, and native speakers helped increase their language fluency. The participants in the study demonstrated that their ability to solve language-related problems and do certain tasks without help improved gradually as they increased their interaction with members of society. The research findings suggested that foreign language learners can improve their proficiency by continual use of the language with knowledgeable members of the community. Thus, the study provided insight into sociocultural learning strategies that facilitate the learning of English as a foreign language. The study also added to the current body of knowledge related to English as a foreign language learning.

Discussion by Research Question

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of a student who learned English as a foreign language within a non-English speaking culture?

In sharing their experiences, participants highlighted the reasons that motivated them to learn English as a foreign language. Previous studies by Fox, Corretjer, and Webb (2019)

pointed out that proficiency in two or more foreign languages gave an advantage over monolingual candidates in the job search. Similarly, participants in this study indicated they chose to learn English as a foreign language because of the advantages associated with the English language. All participants indicated that learning a foreign language with an international dimension like English can have a positive impact on their future lives. According to Fox et al. (2019), today's companies tend to recruit candidates who can adapt to other cultures and fill communication gaps by using a foreign language. Participants indicated that they decided to learn English to gain an advantage over others in finding an international job. For example, Participants 2, 4, and 5 learned English because they wanted to work for an international company.

However, other participants acknowledged that they chose to learn English for reasons related to the education system. In previous studies, Llanes and Serrano (2017) indicated that more and more governments are including foreign language education into the school curriculum. Governments have started to make foreign language education compulsory because they realized its value. Three participants affirmed that their decision to learn English came from the fact that English was embedded in the national curriculum. They acknowledged that, although they were aware that learning English was important, their first step towards English was motivated by their government's decision to make English a compulsory subject for all students. Whether the reason came from the learners themselves or from the government, each of the participants realized the importance of English as a foreign language for educational purposes. Regardless of the source of their motivation to learn English, none of the participants indicated having regretted learning English as a foreign language. Given the importance of

foreign languages, some participants in this study even learned other foreign languages, including German and Spanish.

Another crucial piece of information that participants shared about their experience was how they proceeded to learn English in a non-English-speaking environment. Participants indicated that in a country where most of the population speaks a language other than English, school was the place where they all started to learn English. However, all participants recognized that the school environment in which they learned English did not provide sufficient opportunities for them to practice the language to the point of fluency. In previous studies, Saito and Hanzawa (2018) criticized the teaching method and insufficient exposure of learners to foreign language practices in schools. Likewise, three participants pointed out the weakness of the strategies used by language teachers in their schools. For example, Participant 1 held that learning was only about grammar and pronunciation of words. Participant 2 also stated that teaching exclusively irregular verbs to students without interactive activities did not help him learn the language or gain proficiency in English.

Alzubi and Singh (2018) argued that socio-cultural conditions and environment can be both motivating and discouraging for foreign language learners. In this study, however, the difficult conditions did not discourage participants from learning English at school. On the contrary, the participants managed to find other ways to improve their English outside the classroom. All participants indicated that they learned by creating such opportunities with their friends, family members, and native speakers. Two participants confirmed that they learned a lot from their friends in the evenings or on weekends when they did not have class. One participant shared that she learned more from her mother than from her teacher. Two other participants reported that they learned more English from native speakers with whom they sought friendship

than from their teachers. According to Master et al. (2016), not all learners acquire a foreign language in the same way due to factors including environment and social interaction preferences. In this study, participants learned by using different approaches that matched their learning styles.

In sharing their lived experiences, participants also discussed the barriers they faced when learning English as a foreign language in an environment where English is not the primary language of communication. The first type of barrier the learners encountered was related to the teaching method used in schools. Previous studies conducted by Devlin (2018) showed that students' interest in learning foreign languages at school has decreased due to the inefficiency of the teaching methods in place. The results of this study corroborated the findings of previous research as none of the participants expressed satisfaction with the methods used in school to teach English as a foreign language (Weinberg, 2017). Four participants reported encountering barriers due to old-fashioned teaching methods and the insufficiency of exposure to language use. Only Participant 5 experienced fewer problems at school than the other participants but still expressed dissatisfaction with the teaching methods. Participant 5 said she was fortunate because her parents were fluent in English and her best friend was a native English speaker. Despite the contribution of friends, Participant 5 also expressed dissatisfaction with the method used to teach English as a foreign language in class.

Another type of barrier the participants encountered was related to insufficient resources to facilitate student learning. Research conducted by Gardner (1988) showed that foreign language learners benefit from increased exposure to an environment rich in print materials. Thus, teachers are encouraged to facilitate student access to language reading books, posters, bilingual dictionaries, magazines, labels, bulletin boards, newspapers, and other reference

materials. However, participants shared that their schools did not provide them with the resources needed to ensure language development. Some participants attributed the situation to the financial crises that schools were experiencing due to poverty. For example, Participant 4 said, "I will tell you that we are an underdeveloped country, and it is not easy for students to have resources." Each of the five participants expressed a need for print resources including textbooks, picture books and bilingual dictionaries. Two participants noted a lack of basic resources, including bilingual dictionaries. Two other participants reported that there were insufficient libraries and computers for research. Limited resources, combined with inadequate teaching methods, forced participants to seek outside help.

Participants also indicated that when learning a foreign language, motivation and preparation for the task are crucial. The participants' report corroborated previous research by Weinberg (2017), who observed that motivation is essential for learning and success in a foreign language. Participants also indicated that their awareness of the place of English in the world motivated them. Mindful of the importance of English, participants confirmed being prepared for the task and related challenges. For example, Participant 2 said, "learners should be motivated" to avoid giving up. González-Becerra (2019) emphasized that when learning a new language, the motivation and determination of the learners to cope with the stress and challenges of the language are crucial. All five participants showed personal motivation, not only because English was an academic requirement for them, but also because they were aware of the benefits of learning a foreign language of international scope.

A study by Mazari and Derraz (2016) indicated that language learning is not limited to the school setting. On the contrary, the socio-cultural setting plays a major role in language acquisition. To achieve optimal results, students need to balance their academic and

sociocultural learning experiences when learning a foreign language (Mazari & Derraz, 2016).

In response to weaknesses in academic resources and teaching strategies, participants sought

help outside the classroom. All five participants reported finding help by interacting with

members of their community. Although each person learned differently, as Pryce, Kelly, and

Lawinger (2019) noted, participants' decisions to practice English with a friend, relative, club

members, after-school study group members, or with a native speaker depended primarily on

their availability. In some circumstances, such a decision depended on the participants' current

level of proficiency and the level they were seeking to achieve. For example, participants

acknowledged learning English with friends first. Once they were confident in speaking, they

joined English clubs where they could find knowledgeable speakers to learn at an advanced

level. Participants recognized that they would look for a native speaker as a conversation partner

when they were thinking about acquiring a native accent. All participants shared their

experiences on how they learned English as a foreign language in a sociocultural environment.

Research Question 2: What are strategies for learning English as a foreign language within a non-English speaking culture?

According to Oxford (2016), language learning strategies are the main factors that

determine the quality of an individual's foreign language learning. In a previous study, Noels et

al. (1996) noted that from a sociocultural perspective, the context and learning environment

influenced the strategic inclinations of the learner. In this study, participants reported using

several strategies to achieve their current level of English proficiency. Since most of the learning

took place outside the classroom, the strategies reported by the participants were personal and

socially oriented. Due to the difficulties encountered in their respective schools, the participants

reported relying on their interactions with others to improve their language skills. All five

participants reported using strategies to learn English from sources including relatives, friends, language clubs, and native speakers. For example, one participant decided to speak English all day with his friends, or he would have to pay a fine. However, another participant preferred to have a lesson explained to him by a friend who had a better understanding of that lesson. Although the strategies varied from one participant to another, they all had one thing in common: creating the conditions for regular use of the language.

However, participants indicated that to create the conditions for regular use of the language, they first sought contact with an English-speaking community member who was available to help them communicate. Participants viewed social connections as a crucial step in the foreign language learning strategies they shared. Mathur (2019) argued that foreign language learning is a social activity. Vygotsky (1978) also contended that individuals' role and relationships within the community determine the development of foreign language. Participants in this study emphasized that no one could learn a foreign language in isolation. All five participants recognized that learning a foreign language was a commitment that requires learners to be open to others. For example, Participant 2 suggested that foreign language learners "open up to others to be able to learn in return." Participant 3 also stressed that "social interaction is necessary" for a person to learn a foreign language effectively.

Suparman (2017) noted that conversational practice is the key to any foreign language learning. A previous study conducted by Villafuerte (2017) has shown that foreign language proficiency develops out of practice. According to the participants, once contacts have been established, the learner should consider using the language frequently. Similarly, all participants recognized that they would not have been able to speak English if they had not used the language often until they became proficient. Participants indicated that the practice made them perfect.

Participants reported speaking English with any member of the community who was willing to volunteer his or her time for help. For example, Participant 4 said that whether with friends, relatives, or anyone else who speaks English, "it was always an opportunity for him to practice English." While the participants learned from everyone, four participants preferred to use English with their friends. According to participants, using a foreign language with a friend has an advantage over usage with unknown individuals. Participants felt that foreign language learners should not be ashamed of making mistakes in front of their friends as they could have been in front of someone they barely know.

The data from this study also revealed that not all strategies worked for participants during their learning experiences. Participants indicated that unlike socially oriented strategies, school-based strategies, in general, did not work. For example, Participant 5 said, "if one strategy did not work, it was the one used in class," where the sociocultural dimension of language learning was not integrated into the teaching materials. According to Yaman (2016), language teachers should teach students to develop and acquire skills, not just learn a subject. Students develop skills by engaging in frequent interaction that values not only the language but also its culture (Yaman, 2016). Unfortunately, participants indicated that the instruction they received from the school was not socio-culturally oriented. According to most participants, English teachers spent more time teaching grammar rather than focusing on student interaction and practice time. For example, Participant 2 shared that he had been "learning grammar for many years" but felt he had not learned. Like Participant 2, Participant 5 indicated that the classroom learning strategies were boring by stating that "there were not many interesting activities" that captivated them. Participants indicated that learning a foreign language in a passive environment could not produce positive results for learners. For example, Participant 2

indicated that he felt he was not making progress when he said, "I was in a school where many students were in the same situation: they couldn't speak English." Overall, all five participants blamed their teachers on the insufficient real-life use and practice of the language.

A previous study by Morales (2017) showed that family members and friends play a key role in students' language learning outside the classroom. The data in this study also highlighted the contribution of members of the society to participants' learning of English as a foreign language. Participants mentioned several reasons for learning a foreign language with a relative or friend. Among other reasons, participants reported feeling more comfortable learning English with people they know well. For example, Participant 2 felt "relaxed and comfortable when talking with friends." However, participants recognized that using English with a relative or friend was just to help them practice because their English was not always perfect.

Since English spoken by parents and friends may have some shortcomings, most participants reported joining an English club or after-school study groups to improve their language abilities. According to Suparman (2017), English clubs are an excellent place for learners who wish to use the language at proficiency level. Mammadova (2020) indicated that after-school clubs and study groups function as an extension of the school where learners can review the rules learned in class to develop more skills. Participants confirmed that in the English clubs, they had the opportunity to use English in real-life situations with people with advanced language skills. Four participants confirmed that learning in clubs or groups helped them improve both speaking and listening skills. Two participants who joined after-school study groups recognized that working in teams allowed them to have conversational exchanges in English and complete classwork that they would not have been able to do without help from the club members. Participants indicated that working in teams in an informal setting not only

created motivation but also allowed them to be at the forefront of their learning. All the participants recognized that learning in a group setting offered more opportunities for language improvement than basic conversations with friends or relatives could.

According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), communicating with native speakers helps learners not only improve their accent and language skills but also learn more about the culture. Participants in the study recognized that the ideal for anyone wishing to learn a foreign language is to be as knowledgeable as a native speaker. All participants indicated that while any knowledgeable individual can assist in the language learning process, only frequent communication with native speakers helped achieve language perfection. Participants shared that English learned in a classroom setting cannot help to achieve the proficiency of a native speaker. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) observed that only non-native speakers who learn in a natural setting alongside native speakers can develop such competence. To develop the correct accent for more effective communication, the learner must communicate frequently with people who have an English accent. Finally, participants indicated that a foreign language is learned together with its corresponding culture. According to the participants, knowledge of the language and the culture required them to increase their interaction with native speakers.

Study Limitations

This study sought to understand the lived experiences of former learners of English as a foreign language. Although efforts were made to maximize the quality of the study throughout the research process, limitations exist. According to Queirós, Faria, and Almeida (2017), every research study has constraints and limitations.

The first limitation identified was that the study population was limited to students who studied English as a foreign language in African countries. According to Yin (2018), selecting

the study population in a single geographic area may limit the generalization of the findings to EFL students in other parts of the world. Another limitation related to the geographic area was that all five participants are French speakers. The target population for this study was former students who studied English as a foreign language in a non-English-speaking environment. Therefore, the population may have included students from other linguistic backgrounds, including Spanish, Arabic, and German speakers. To address issues related to the study population, the participants were diversified in terms of gender, age, occupation, and country of origin.

Another constraint observed in this research study was that the sample size was limited to five participants. According to Queirós et al. (2017), when conducting a research study, researchers need to maximize their sample size to increase the chances of obtaining a valid research result. Thus, for phenomenological research studies, Creswell (2013) suggested three to 15 subjects, and Dukes (1984) recommended three to 10 participants. However, due to the availability of people who studied English as a foreign language in a foreign country, the sample size was limited to five participants. This number may not be representative of the larger population who have studied English as a foreign language, which affects the generalizability of the results.

According to Snyder (2019), when conducting research, the existence of previous literature helps identify the scope of previous studies conducted in the same field. Thus, a final limitation noted in this study is the lack of previous studies on the research topic. Most of the previous literature on foreign language learning deals with formal teaching practices, in which the teacher is the main actor in the learning process (Mazari & Derraz, 2016). However, this study focused on the role of society and culture in the learning of English as a foreign language.

Therefore, access to the literature related to the research questions was limited. To address issues related to the lack of literature, a critical evaluation of existing studies was conducted to ensure that the information needed was obtained (Snyder, 2019).

Implications for Further Practice

Research has revealed that knowledge of foreign languages helps students communicate across cultures, which contributes to improving their learning abilities (Hao, 2016). As students learn foreign languages, the chance they acquire additional skills in other disciplines increases as well (Hao, 2016). Thus, foreign language learning has become the focus of many nations' educational systems. In the United States, foreign language learning and education have not yet gained full national interest (Devlin, 2018). The results of a recent survey conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed that less than 20% of school-aged Americans were interested in learning a foreign language compared to 92% of the same category of learners in Europe (Devlin, 2018). The data suggested that practices in foreign language education need improvement.

The goal of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of former learners of English as a foreign language. This study was intended to describe and interpret the sociocultural dimension of learning English as a foreign language. Although this study has limitations, the findings of the research have implications for foreign language researchers, school administrators, curriculum developers, foreign language educators, and government entities. Three recommendations for future research resulted from this phenomenological study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendation 1

According to Woodrow (2017), interest and motivation are the first reasons an individual succeeds at learning a foreign language. Unfortunately, many students are still reluctant to learn foreign languages because they are not motivated by a particular interest or reason for doing so. The results of this study showed that the five participants learned English because not only did they show an interest in English but also because the departments of education in their home countries made English a required subject for all students. Other participants were motivated to learn because they were aware that English is a bridge to the outside world, including the international job market. The results of the study suggest that all actors in the education system contribute to increasing students' interest in learning foreign languages. In addition to making foreign languages compulsory in schools, information sessions must be held to help students understand the benefits of learning a foreign language in a globalized world. Teachers should teach students that a foreign language should not be regarded as a discipline imposed on them but as an opportunity to develop new skills that can open countless possibilities in professional life.

Recommendation 2

The results of this study showed that although participants were interested in learning English, many barriers prevented them from achieving the desired speaking and listening skills in school. Based on the results, the teaching methods used in the participants' schools, as explained, were the root cause of their decision to develop culturally oriented learning strategies. A study conducted by Woodrow (2017) showed students' interest in learning foreign languages at school decreased due to the inefficiency of the teaching methods. Al Zoubi (2018) criticized the

teaching method and the lack of exposure of learners to foreign language practice at school. Research findings revealed the need to educate students using teaching methods and strategies that integrate the socio-cultural aspects of foreign language learning. The results of the study support the assertion that sufficient exposure to foreign language practices contributes to improving the language skills of EFL learners (Al-Zoubi, 2018). According to Efstathiadi (2019), theoretical knowledge acquired in most language classes can contribute to the basic prerequisite of foreign language learning. However, to ensure full mastery of foreign languages, educators and school administrators should create opportunities for students to use the language frequently. The opportunities may include the establishment of English clubs or other language immersion programs for learners.

Recommendation 3

According to Mart (2018), while resources alone do not guarantee learning, the availability of adequate resources facilitates foreign language learning. Research conducted by Efstathiadi (2019) also showed that foreign language learners would benefit from increased exposure to an environment rich in print materials. However, the results of the study revealed that the participants were not provided with the resources needed to ensure language development in the school environment. Some participants attributed the issue to the budgetary problems that schools were experiencing due to poverty. Teachers and actors of the education system are encouraged to facilitate student access to language reading books, posters, bilingual dictionaries, magazines, labels, bulletin boards, newspapers, and other reference materials in the target language. According to Sadiq, Cavus, and Ibrahim (2019), access to the internet has also become a must in this digital world. To interact with native speakers and learn about the culture of the target language, students who cannot afford full immersion programs in foreign countries

need access to the internet. The findings of this study support the need for both teachers and students to have access to adequate learning resources to ensure progress.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of former learners of English as a foreign language. This research study was intended to describe and interpret the sociocultural dimension of learning English as a foreign language. The results of the study suggested three themes related to foreign language learning experiences and strategies: rationale for foreign language learning, learning challenges, and strategies for learning English as a foreign language. The five participants in this study emphatically voiced their interest in learning English as a foreign language in a non-English speaking environment. While the participants encountered obstacles due to the learning environment and teaching strategies used in their schools, all of them demonstrated learning by developing personal strategies characterized by their sociocultural orientations.

This study added to the current body of literature regarding strategies to learn English as a foreign language in a non-English speaking environment. Findings of previous research studies have revealed an abundance of strategies exist for people interested in learning foreign languages. However, most of the studies emphasize strategies to learn the language in a formal school context. Mazari and Derraz (2016) indicated that foreign languages are not exclusive to a formal school-based learning process since much of the learners' experiences employ sociocultural values. Overall, evidence presented in this research study suggests that a foreign language can be learned even in any environment, provided the learner embraces a sociocultural orientation of learning. To achieve that result, the participants in this study increased their interaction and the use of language with the members of the community. While sociocultural

consideration helps improve language abilities, Mazari and Derraz (2016) recommended students should balance school-based and sociocultural learning experiences when learning a foreign language. For optimal results, both in-school and out-of-school learning experiences are necessary to excel in learning a foreign language.

References

Abdalla, M., Oliveira, L., Azevedo, C., & Gonzalez, R. (2018). Quality in Qualitative

Organizational Research: types of triangulation as a methodological alternative.

Administração (São Paulo), 19(1), 66–98. doi.org/10.13058/raep.2018.v19n1.578

Acheson, K., Taylor, J., & Luna, K. (2016). The burnout spiral: The emotion labor of five rural

US foreign language teachers. *The Modern Language Journal*, *100*(2), 522-537.

doi:10.1111/modl.12333

Agbatogun, A. O. (2014). Developing learners' second language communicative competence

through active learning: Clickers or communicative approach? *Journal of Educational*

Technology & Society, *17*(2), 257-269. Retrieved from

https://www.jstor.org/stable/jeductechsoci.17.2.257

Al Zoubi, S. M. (2018). The impact of exposure to English language on language

acquisition. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, *5*(4), 151-162.

Retrieved from http://www.jallr.com/index.php/JALLR/article/view/851

AlSaleem, B. I. (2018). The Effect of Facebook Activities on Enhancing Oral Communication

Skills for EFL Learners. *International Education Studies, 11*(5), 144.

doi:10.5539/ies.v11n5p144

Alshahrani, A. (2016). Communicating Authentically: Enhancing EFL Students' Spoken English

via Videoconferencing. *CALL-EJ*, *17*(2), 1-17. Retrieved from

http://callej.org/journal/17-2/Alshahrani2016.pdf

Alsowat, H. (2016). An EFL flipped classroom teaching model: Effects on English language

higher-order thinking skills, student engagement and satisfaction. *Journal of Education*

and Practice, *7*(9), 108-121. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1095734

Alzubi, A. A. F., & Singh, M. K. (2018). The Impact of Social Strategies through Smartphones

      on the Saudi Learners' Socio-Cultural Autonomy in EFL Reading Context. *International*

      Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, *11*(1), 31-40.

      doi:10.26822/iejee.2018143958

Ames, H., Glenton, C., & Lewin, S. (2019). Purposive sampling in a qualitative evidence

      synthesis: a worked example from a synthesis on parental perceptions of vaccination

      communication. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *19*(1), 26–29.

      doi.org/10.1186/s12874-019-0665-4

Ang, S., Rockstuhl, T., & Tan, M. L. (2015). Cultural intelligence and competencies. In

      International Encyclopedia of Social & Behavioral Sciences, 433-439. doi:10.1016/b978-

      0-08-097086-8.25050-2

Aoyama, T., & Takahashi, T. (2020). International Students' Willingness to Communicate in

      English as a Second Language. *Journal of International Students*, *10*(3). doi:

      10.32674/jis.v10i3.730ojed.org/jis

Basal, A. (2015). The implementation of a flipped classroom in foreign language

      teaching. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, *16*(4), 28-37.

      doi:10.17718/tojde.72185

Benrabah, B. (2019). Language proficiency through vocabulary development: A

      framework. *Arab World English Journal, 1*, 78-85. doi:10.24093/awej/Chief1.7

Bensalem, E. (2018). The impact of WhatsApp on EFL students' vocabulary learning. *Arab*

      World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume, *9*. doi:10.24093/awej/vol9no1.2

Blaz, D. (2018). *The world language teacher's guide to active learning: strategies and activities*

      for increasing student engagement. New York, NY: Routledge.

Bordia, S., & Bordia, P. (2015). Employees' willingness to adopt a foreign functional language in multilingual organizations: The role of linguistic identity. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *46*(4), 415-428. doi:10.1057/jibs.2014.65

Burns, R., Rubin, D., & Tarrant, M. A. (2018). World language learning: The impact of study abroad on student engagement. In *Study Abroad Contexts for Enhanced Foreign Language Learning* (pp. 1-22). IGI Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-5225-3814-1.ch001

Chapdelaine, S., Shields, H., & Forwell, S. J. (2017). How mothers experience their adolescents' first year in high school. *Journal of Occupational Science*, *24*(3), 338-350. doi:10.1080/14427591.2016.1254675

Chen, G.-M., & Starosta, W. J. (2000). Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. PsycTESTS Dataset. doi:10.1037/t61546-000

Chen Hsieh, J. S., Wu, W. C. V., & Marek, M. W. (2017). Using the flipped classroom to enhance EFL learning. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *30*(1-2), 1-21. doi:10.1080/09588221.2015.1111910

Çiloğlan, F., & Bardakçi, M. (2019). The relationship between intercultural sensitivity and English language achievement. *Dil ve Dilbilimi Çalışmaları Dergisi*, *15*(3), 1204-1214. doi:10.17263/jlls.631563.

Coyle, Y., Reverte Prieto, M. J., & Martinez Rico, D. (2017). Children's interaction and lexical acquisition in text-based online chat. *Language Learning & Technology*, *21*(2), 179-199. doi:10125/44617

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Dang, B., Westbrook, R., Njue, S., & Giordano, T. (2017). Building trust and rapport early in the new doctor-patient relationship: a longitudinal qualitative study. *BMC Medical Education*, *17*(1), 32–. doi.org/10.1186/s12909-017-0868-5

Deterding, N., & Waters, M. (2018). Flexible coding of in-depth interviews: A twenty-first-century approach. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *50*(2), 708-739. doi.org/10.1177/0049124118799377

Deveci, T. (2015). A comparative study of the lifelong learning propensities of English language learners: Nationality, gender and length of study. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives*, *12*(1), 7-16.

Devlin, K. (2018, August 6). *Unlike in US, most European students learn a foreign language*. Pew Research. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/06/most-european-students-are-learning-a-foreign-language-in-school-while-americans-lag/

DeWaelsche, S. A. (2015). Critical thinking, questioning and student engagement in Korean University English courses. *Linguistics and Education*, *32*, 131-147. doi:10.1016/j.linged.2015.10.003

Downes, S. (2008). Places to go: Connectivism & connective knowledge. *Innovate: Journal of Online Education, 5*(1), 6. Retrieved from https://nsuworks.nova.edu/innovate/vol5/iss1/6/

Dukes, S. (1984). Phenomenological methodology in the human sciences. *Journal of Religion and Health*, *23*(3), 197-203. doi:10.1007/bf00990785

Efstathiadi, L. (2019). Early Foreign Language Learning: Intensive Exposure, Vocabulary

  Development and the Cognitive Skills Involved. *Belgrade English Language and*

  Literature Studies, 11, 81–111. doi:10.18485/bells.2019.11.4

Errasti-Ibarrondo, B., Jordán, J. A., Díez-Del-Corral, M. P., & Arantzamendi, M. (2018).

  Conducting phenomenological research: Rationalizing the methods and rigour of the

  phenomenology of practice. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 74*(7), 1723–1734.

  doi:10.1111/jan.13569

Flores, J. F. F. (2015). Using gamification to enhance second language learning. *Digital*

  Education Review, (27), 32-54.

Flynn, S., & Korcuska, J. (2018). Credible Phenomenological Research: A Mixed-Methods

  Study. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 57*(1), 34–50. doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12092

Fox, R., Corretjer, O., & Webb, K. (2019). Benefits of foreign language learning and

  bilingualism: An analysis of published empirical research 2012–2019. *Foreign Language*

  Annals, 52(4), 699–726. doi.org/10.1111/flan.12424

Gardner, R. C. (1988). The socio-educational model of second-language learning: Assumptions,

  findings, and issues. *Language Learning*, *38*(1), 101-126. doi:10.1111/j.1467-

  1770.1988.tb00403.x

Ge, X., & Ifenthaler, D. (2017). Designing engaging educational games and assessing

  engagement in game-based learning. In R. Zheng & M. K. Gardner (Eds.), *Handbook of*

  research on serious games for educational applications (pp. 255-272). Hershey, PA: IGI

  Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-5225-0513-6.ch012

Gilakjani, S. (2016). How can EFL teachers help EFL learners improve their English pronunciation? *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *7*(5), 967–972. doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0705.18

González-Becerra, I. (2019). Language learning among STEM students: Motivational profile and attitudes of undergraduates in a UK institution. *The Language Learning Journal*, *47*(3), 385-401. doi:10.1080/09571736.2017.1320421

Gurning, B., & Siregar, A. (2017). The effect of teaching strategies and curiosity on students' achievement in reading comprehension. *English Language Teaching*, *10*(11), 191-198. doi:10.5539/elt.v10n11p191

Graham, L., & Schuwerk, T. J. (2016). Teaching qualitative research methods using Undercover Boss. *Communication Teacher, 31*(1), 11–15. doi:10.1080/17404622.2016.1244345

Gray, J. A. (1980). Ivan Pavlov (p. 81). New York: Viking Press.

Groenewald, T. (2016). A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *3*(1), 42–55. doi.org/10.1177/160940690400300104

Hamid, S. M. (2015). Enriching vocabulary through social interaction model. *Exposure, 4*(1), 40-53. doi:10.26618/ejpbi.v4i1.921

Hammer, K., & Dewaele, J.-M. (2015). 6. Acculturation as the key to the ultimate attainment? The case of Polish-English bilinguals in the UK. *Cultural Migrants and Optimal Language Acquisition*, 178–202. doi:10.21832/9781783094042-008

Hao, Y. (2016). Middle school students' flipped learning readiness in foreign language classrooms: Exploring its relationship with personal characteristics and individual circumstances. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *59*, 295-303. doi.10.1016/j.chb.2016.01.031

Hernandez, W., López-Presa, J., & Maldonado-Correa, J. (2016). Power performance

    verification of a wind farm using the Friedman's test. *Sensors, 16*(6), 816.

    doi:10.3390/s16060816

Hwang, W. Y., Shadiev, R., Hsu, J. L., Huang, Y. M., Hsu, G. L., & Lin, Y. C. (2016). Effects of

    storytelling to facilitate EFL speaking using web-based multimedia system. *Computer*

    Assisted Language Learning, *29*(2), 215-241. doi:10.1080/09588221.2014.927367

Kapler, I. V., Weston, T., & Wiseheart, M. (2015). Spacing in a simulated undergraduate

    classroom: Long-term benefits for factual and higher-level learning. *Learning and*

    Instruction, *36*, 38-45. doi:10.1016/j.learninstruc.2014.11.001

Krashen, S. (2016). Response to Sugiharto, "Comprehensible input as social alignment." Turkish

    Online Journal of English Language Teaching, 1(2). doi:10.32959/tojelt.229326

Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Child-adult differences in second language acquisition. series on issues in*

    second language research. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Establishing trustworthiness. *Naturalistic*

    inquiry, *289*(331), 289-327.

Llanes, À., & Serrano, R. (2017). The effectiveness of classroom instruction 'at home' versus

    study abroad for learners of English as a foreign language attending primary school,

    secondary school and university. *The Language Learning Journal*, *45*(4), 434-446.

    doi:10.1080/09571736.2014.923033

Lupyan, G., & Bergen, B. (2016). How language programs the mind. *Topics in Cognitive*

    Science, *8*(2), 408-424. doi:10.1111/tops.12155

MacWhinney, B. (2017). Computational analysis of interactions. *The handbook of child*

    language, 152-178. doi:10.1111/b.9780631203124.1996.00006.x

Mahmoodzadeh, M., & Khajavy, G. H. (2019). Towards conceptualizing language learning curiosity in SLA: An empirical study. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, *48*(2), 333-351. doi:10.1007/s10936-018-9606-3

Makarova, V., & Reva, A. (2017). Perceived impact of extra-curricular activities on foreign language learning in Canadian and Russian university contexts. *Apples – Journal of Applied Language Studies, 11*(1), 43–65. doi:10.17011/apples/urn.201704252075

Mammadova, T. (2020). English outside the classroom. In *Exploring English Language Teaching in Post-Soviet Era Countries*, 94–97. doi:10.4324/9781003037682-11

Mart, C. (2018). Literature in language teaching: A recipe to maximize learning. *L1-Educational Studies in Language and Literature*, *18*(Running Issue), 1–25. doi.org/10.17239/L1ESLL-2018.18.01.09

Master, B., Loeb, S., Whitney, C., & Wyckoff, J. (2016). Different skills? Identifying differentially effective teachers of English language learners. *The Elementary School Journal*, *117*(2), 261-284. doi:10.1086/688871

Mattar, J. (2018). Constructivism and connectivism in education technology: Active, situated, authentic, experiential, and anchored learning. *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación a Distancia*, *21*(2), 201–217. doi.org/10.5944/ried.21.2.20055

Mathur, N. (2019). Fostering engaged prospects through digital and social media: How to get and keep their attention. In *New age admissions strategies in business schools* (pp. 230-250). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi:10.4018/978-1-5225-9073-6.ch014

Mazari, A., & Derraz, N. (2016). Language and culture. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)*, *2*(2), 350-359.

McWhorter, M. (2019). Balancing Value Bracketing with the Integration of Moral Values in

      Psychotherapy: Evaluation of a Clinical Practice from the Perspective of Catholic Moral

      Theology. *The Linacre Quarterly*, *86*(2-3), 207–224.

      doi.org/10.1177/0024363919856810

Mirzaei, S., & Hayati, A. F. (2018). Effects of the computer mediated communication interaction

      on vocabulary improvement. *Telkomnika*, *16*(5), 2217-2225.

      doi:10.12928/TELKOMNIKA.v16i5.10195

Morales, S. (2017). Relationship between social context and L2 learning of EFL students in

      tertiary level. *English Language Teaching (Toronto)*, *10*(10), 87–91.

      doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n10p87

Morse, M. (1994). Designing funded qualitative research. In Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna

      S.Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp.220-35). Thousand Oaks,

      CA: Sage

Moser, A., & Korstjens, I. (2017). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3:

      Sampling, data collection and analysis. *The European Journal of General

      Practice*, *24*(1), 9–18. doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375091

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mulatu, M., & Bezabih, W. (2018). Perceptions and practices of EFL teachers in implementing

      active learning in English classes: The case of three selected secondary schools in Dawro

      zone, SNNPRS, Ethiopia. *International Journal of Education*, *10*(2), 88-94.

      doi:10.17509/ije.v10i2.8461

Mundy-Taylor, J., May, J., & Reynolds, R. (2015). Storytelling in 3D: Interrogating engagement with oral storytelling in the school classroom. *Storytelling, Self, Society*, *11*(2), 159-182. doi:10.13110/storselfsoci.11.2.0159

Münch, D., Grosselfinger, A.-K., Krempel, E., Hebel, M., & Arens, M. (2019). Data Anonymization for Data Protection on Publicly Recorded Data. *Computer Vision Systems*, 245–258. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-34995-0_23

Namaziandost, E., Gilakjani, A. P., & Hidayatullah. (2020). Enhancing pre-intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension through the use of Jigsaw technique. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, *7*(1), 1738833. doi:10.1080/23311983.2020.1738833

Naseri, S., & Motallebzadeh, K. (2016). Podcasts: A factor to improve Iranian EFL learner's self-regulation ability and use of technology. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, *19*(2), 328-339.

Nicolopoulou, A. (2019). Using a storytelling/story-acting practice to promote narrative and other decontextualized language skills in disadvantaged children. *Narrative, Literacy and Other Skills: Studies in intervention*, *25*, 263. doi:10.1075/sin.25.13nic

Noels, K. A., Pon, G., & Clément, R. (1996). Language, identity, and adjustment: The role of linguistic self-confidence in the acculturation process. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *15*(3), 246-264. doi:10.1177/0261927x960153003

Ostler, N. (2005). *Empires of the word: A language history of the world*. New York: HarperCollins.

Oxford, R. L. (2016). Teaching and Researching Language Learning Strategies. Milton Park, Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis. doi:10.4324/9781315719146

Park, Y., Yu, J. H., & Jo, I. H. (2016). Clustering blended learning courses by online behavior data: A case study in a Korean higher education institute. *The Internet and Higher Education*, *29*, 1-11. doi:10.1016/j.iheduc.2015.11.001

Paul, K. (2017). Introducing Interpretive Approach of Phenomenological Research Methodology in Environmental Philosophy: A Mode of Engaged Philosophy in the Anthropocene. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *16*(1). doi.org/10.1177/1609406917724916

Peeters, W. (2019). The peer interaction process on Facebook: a social network analysis of learners' online conversations. *Education and Information Technologies*, *24*(5), 3177-3204. doi:10.1007/s10639-019-09914-2

Pham, H. T. (2018). Employing Facebook to develop learners' speaking skills. *VietTESOL International Convention 2018*. Retrieved from https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Employing-Facebook-To-Develop-Learners%E2%80%99-Speaking-Pham/dad7f521327266cabf57642e97128dcf2ebec5f0

Phillippi, J., & Lauderdale, J. (2017). A guide to field notes for qualitative research: Context and conversation. *Qualitative Health Research*, *28*(3), 381–388. doi.org/10.1177/1049732317697102

Piaget, J. (1959). The language and thought of the child. New York: Humanities Press https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4719/99a9e2705247d6f1a0e4b5c3badb308f28d1.pdf

Piriyasurawong, P.P. (2019). Active learning using ARCS motivation on social cloud model to enhance communication skills in foreign language. *TEM Journal*, *8*(1), 290-297.

Pryce, J., Kelly, M., & Lawinger, M. (2019). Conversation Club: A Group Mentoring Model for
Immigrant Youth. *Youth & Society*, *51*(7), 879–899.
doi.org/10.1177/0044118X18780526

Queirós, A., Faria, D., & Almeida, F. (2017). Strengths and limitations of qualitative and
quantitative research methods. *European Journal of Education Studies*. doi:
10.5281/zenodo.887089

Ramírez-Esparza, N., García-Sierra, A., & Jiang, S. (2020). The current standing of bilingualism
in today's globalized world: a socio-ecological perspective. *Current Opinion in
Psychology, 32*, 124–128. doi:10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.06.038

Richards, J. C. (2015). The changing face of language learning: learning beyond the classroom.
RELC Journal, 46(1), 5–22. doi:10.1177/0033688214561621

Robin, B. (2016). The power of digital storytelling to support teaching and learning. *Digital
Education Review*, *30*, 17-29. Retrieved from http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu

Ross, M., Iguchi, M., & Panicker, S. (2018). Ethical aspects of data sharing and research
participant protections. *The American Psychologist*, *73*(2), 138–145.
doi.org/10.1037/amp0000240

Sadiq, R. B., Cavus, N., & Ibrahim, D. (2019). Mobile application based on CCI standards to
help children learn English as a foreign language. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 1–
16. doi:10.1080/10494820.2019.1579239

Saito, K., & Hanzawa, K. (2018). The role of input in second language oral ability development
in foreign language classrooms: A longitudinal study. *Language Teaching Research*,
22(4), 398–417. doi:10.1177/1362168816679030

Sarıca, H. Ç., & Usluel, Y. K. (2016). The effect of digital storytelling on visual memory and writing skills. *Computers & Education*, *94*, 298-309. doi:10.1016/j.compedu.2015.11.016

Saunders, B., Kitzinger, J., & Kitzinger, C. (2015). Anonymising interview data: Challenges and compromise in practice. *Qualitative Research*, *15*(5), 616-632.

Shahdadi, H., & Rahnama, M. (2018). Experience of Nurses in Hemodialysis Care: A Phenomenological Study. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, *7*(2), 30. doi.org/10.3390/jcm7020030

Shively, R. L. (2016). An activity theoretical approach to social interaction during study abroad. *L2 Journal*, *8*(2). doi:10.5070/l28228670

Siemens. G. (2005). Connectivism: A learning theory for the digital age. *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning. 2*(1). Retrieved from http://www.itdl.org/Journal/Jan_05/article01.htm

Skinner, G. W. (1957). *Chinese society in Thailand: An analytical history*. Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press.

Smagorinsky, P., & Smith, M. W. (2001). Considering context. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *35*(3), 285.

Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: *An overview and guidelines. Journal of Business Research*, *104*, 333–339. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039

Starks-Yoble, G., & Moeller, A. J. (2015). Learning German with technology: The student perspective. *Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German*, *48*(1), 41-58. doi:10.1111/tger.10180

Stein-Smith, K. (2019). Rethinking the Role of Languages in the US: Toward a More Diverse

    Cultural Identity. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 10*(3), 403.

    doi:10.17507/jltr.1003.01

Steinlen, A. K. (2017). The development of English grammar and reading comprehension by

    majority and minority language children in a bilingual primary school. *Studies in Second*

    Language Learning and Teaching, *7*(3), 419-442. doi:10.14746/ssllt.2017.7.2.4

Soomro, A. H., & Mahesar, M. I. K. (2017). Culture and Foreign Language Reading.

    International Journal of English and Education,(6), 3.

Su, Y. C. (2018). Assessing Taiwanese college students' intercultural sensitivity, EFL interests,

    attitudes toward native English speakers, ethnocentrism, and their interrelation. *The Asia-*

    Pacific Education Researcher, *27*(3), 217-226. doi:10.1007/s40299-018-0380-7

Suparman, L. (2017). The effectiveness of the English conversation to improve students'

    speaking skill. *Palapa*, *5*(2), 38-52. doi:10.36088/palapa.v5i2.45

Swanson, P., & Mason, S. (2018). The world language teacher shortage: Taking a new

    direction. *Foreign Language Annals*, *51*(1), 251-262. doi:10.1111/flan.12321

Tehee, M., Isaacs, D., & Domenech Rodríguez, M. M. (2020). The elusive construct of cultural

    competence. *Handbook of Cultural Factors in Behavioral Health*, 11–24.

    doi:10.1007/978-3-030-32229-8_2

Tuncel, I., & Paker, T. (2018). Effects of an intercultural communication course in developing

    intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Higher Education*, *7*(6), 198-211.

    doi:10.5430/ijhe.v7n6p198

Van Niejenhuis, C., Otten, S., & Flache, A. (2018). Sojourners' second language learning and integration. The moderating effect of multicultural personality traits. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *63*, 68-79. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2018.01.001

Villafuerte, R. (2017). Learners' attitudes toward foreign language practice on social network sites. *Journal of Education and Learning*, *6*(4), 145–. doi.org/10.5539/jel.v6n4p145

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Weinberg, L. (2017). Motivation, technology and language learning. In C. Sancho-Guinda & R. Breeze (Eds.) *Essential Competencies for English-medium University Teaching* (pp. 295-307). Switzerland: Springer, Cham. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-40956-6_20

Wistner, B., Sakai, H., & Abe, M. (2009). An analysis of the Oxford Placement Test and the Michigan English Placement Test as L2 proficiency tests. *Bulletin of the Faculty of Letters, Hosei University*, *58*, 33-44.

Woodrow, L. (2017). Motivation in language learning. *Essential competencies for English-medium University teaching* (pp. 235-248). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

Yaman, I. (2016). Book Review on "ETpedia: 1,000 ideas for English language teachers." *Sakarya University Journal of Education, 6*(1), 170. doi:10.19126/suje.68670

Yang, H., & Wang, Y. (2018). Predicting U.S. college students' interest in studying in China: social influence, personal experiences, country reputation, and media coverage. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 30*(2), 136–160. doi:10.36366/frontiers.v30i2.417

Yilmaz, R. (2017). Exploring the role of e-learning readiness on student satisfaction and motivation in flipped classroom. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *70*, 251-260. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2016.12.085

Yu, Y., Bonawitz, E., & Shafto, P. (2019). Pedagogical questions in parent–child conversations. *Child Development*, *90*(1), 147-161. doi:10.1111/cdev.12850

Yukselturk, E., Altıok, S., & Başer, Z. (2018). Using game-based learning with kinect technology in foreign language education course. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society, 21*(3), 159-173.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Interviewer: Nguessan Yobouet

Date:

Time:

Location:

Interview Questions:

1	Why did you choose to learn English as a foreign language?
2	How did you learn English in a country where most people speak another language?
3	Tell me more about the obstacles you faced during your learning experience
4	How did you manage to solve those obstacles?
5	What happened after you solved the obstacles you faced?
6	How would you describe the strategies you employed to learn English as a foreign language?
7	What strategy helped you the most when you learned English in a country that speaks another language?
8	Tell me about strategies that were not helpful.
9	What contribution did you receive from your family and friends?
10	How did you exploit the contribution of your family and friends toward your success in learning English as a foreign language?

Appendix B

Adult Consent to Be Interviewed

Research Title: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FORMER ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS

Investigators: Dr. Sarah Yates, Principal Investigator, sjyates@seu.edu
Dr. Janet Deck, Co-investigator, jldeck@seu.edu
Mr. Nguessan Yobouet, Student Investigator, nyobouet@seu.edu

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to understand the lived experiences of former learners of English as a foreign language. This study intends to describe and interpret the socio-cultural dimension of learning English as a foreign language.

Data Collection Procedure: The data will be collected from the participant using in-depth interviews. Using a criterion sampling, the study will collect interviews from participants who have shared experiences for learning English as a foreign language within a non-English speaking culture. The interview will be conducted over the telephone and will last for approximately 30 minutes. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed using a software known as Otter (https://otter.ai/login).

What to Expect: This research study is administered remotely throughout a phone interview. Participation in this research will consist of providing answers to the attached questions. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. You will be expected to be interviewed once. It should take you about 30 minutes to complete.

Risks: There are no risks associated with this project which are expected to be greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you. However, you may gain an appreciation and understanding of how research is conducted.

Compensation: You will not receive financial compensation for participating in this interview. However, your participation will be a valuable contribution to furthering knowledge about learning English in a country where most people speak another language.

Your Rights and Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. Data will be destroyed five years after the study has been completed.

Contacts: You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: Dr. Sarah Yates at sjyates@seu.edu or 863-667-5416.
If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office IRB@seu.edu

Please, click "YES" if you choose to participate. By clicking "YES", you are indicating that you freely and voluntarily and agree to participate in this study and you also acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age. After choosing "YES" or "NO" please save this file and send it back to me by replying to my email at nyobouet@seu.edu

☐YES
☐NO

Thank you.

Appendix C

Email Invitation to Participants

Dear Participant,

As a doctorate candidate at Southeastern University, I am conducting research entitled:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF FORMER STUDENTS OF

ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE.

This study aims to describe and interpret the socio-cultural dimension of learning English as a

foreign language in a non-English-speaking environment.

Knowing your background in this area, you have been selected to participate in the research.

Your participation will consist of sharing your experience on the above-mentioned topic during a

telephone interview. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes and will be recorded.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and your identity will remain confidential. You

may withdraw from the study at any time during the study if you feel the need to do so.

Please see the attached consent form for more information about the study and who to contact if

you have any questions. If you choose to participate, please click "YES" at the bottom of the

attached consent form, save it, and return it to me by replying to my email at nyobouet@seu.edu

Thank you for considering participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Nguessan Yobouet
Ed.D. Candidate
Southeastern University
1000 Longfellow Blvd.
Lakeland, FL 33801
www.seu.edu
nyobouet@seu.edu