Determinants of the Chinese Language and Reading Comprehension of Junior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the level of English proficiency and foreign language learning motivation (FLLM) among Junior High School (JHS) students. Furthermore, this research probed whether the English proficiency and foreign language learning motivation significantly correlate with the Chinese language listening and reading comprehension (CLLRC) of JHS students. The current study was conducted using quantitative method, specifically the descriptive-correlational approach. Through a census or complete enumeration, two hundred sixteen JHS students under the Special Program in Foreign Language (SPFL) in the province of Davao del Sur served as the respondents. An adapted and expert-validated questionnaires were used to gather the data. The findings revealed a high level of English proficiency and foreign language learning motivation. Contrary, the Chinese language listening and reading comprehension was found to be low. However, the results indicated that the respondents passed the Chinese test based on the Youth Chinese Test (YCT) guidelines. Furthermore, the results revealed a significant correlation between English proficiency, foreign language learning motivation and Chinese language listening and reading comprehension of the JHS students.

Keywords: Education, English, Chinese Mandarin, motivation, language learning, quantitative research, Davao del sur, Philippines.

INTRODUCTION

Chinese Mandarin as Foreign Language has ascended its way in the global scene in recent years as a result of China's rise as a major economy in the world (Alshammari, 2020; Kandambi, 2020; Chen et al., 2017). However, despite the fact that Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) has established its global relevance (Lam, 2020), Chinese language learners worldwide still struggle in the classrooms as CFL continue to face various challenges (Constantino, 2021; Alshammari, 2020; Spencer, 2015). Particularly, issues on Chinese language listening (Osborne 2020; Liu, 2020; Fong & Ho, 2017; Wen, 2009) and reading comprehension (Zhou, 2017; Rai et al., 2014; Lau & Chan, 2003) were found to be the common problem in CFL classes.

Researchers worldwide have documented several issues in CFL. In United Kingdom, Hu (2010) identified the challenging areas faced by CFL learners which to mention were pronunciation, words, aural reception, oral production, recall and grammar. A closer look in England, CFL met difficulties although implementing the said language has already gone beyond a trial period. Lam (2020) suggests developmental trends of Chinese Mandarin in England such as appropriate teaching approaches and strategies to non-native Chinese learners to sustain learners' motivation to address the challenges. In Nigeria, Eze and Ejiofor (2019) exposed various challenges students experience when studying CFL. The results of the study revealed that in terms of Chinese reading comprehension, 58% of the respondents claimed of having problem with Chinese grammar, 46% claimed of having poor grasp of Chinese culture and 46% of the total respondents agreed that stress and anxiety affected their comprehension. These issues attributed to reading skills are perceived to hamper the reading

comprehension of the students. In Saudi Arabia, Alshammari (2020) also identified that the greatest barriers to implementing CFL are learner factors such as learners' motivation, ability, cultural issues, and perceptions about difficulties in language acquisition.

Drawing in the Philippine context, more Filipinos are becoming interested in studying Chinese language as its practical and implicational value in Philippine society increased (Xu & Wang, 2019). With this significance, the Department of Education (DepEd) included foreign language education through the Special Program in the Foreign Language (SPFL). The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) also released a Memorandum Order stipulating the inclusion of foreign language courses as an elective in higher learning institutions. However, the FL program has encountered challenges over the years. Constantino (2021) revealed a decline in the number of Filipino learners of Mandarin advancing to higher levels each year which highlights the challenges and difficulties that the students met while learning Chinese Mandarin. Constantino further revealed that among the macro skills, listening has the second difficulty rate of 39.3% prompting listening a challenge while 10.7% to reading. Meanwhile, a related study conducted by Baello and Cultivo (2021) showed that 11% of the teacher respondents agreed that reading comprehension is difficult to teach demonstrating issues in the field. With the figures mentioned above, this suggests that teachers and curriculum designers are facing a challenge on devising an intervention that would address this problem.

Tracing issues locally, concerns on CFL specifically on listening and reading comprehension among Chinese learners were observed. Teachers in the province of Davao del Sur expressed concern about the students' performance in Chinese classes because most students manifested lack of comprehension to simple phrases and sentences. The local teachers have also expressed concern over the low scores the learners get in listening and reading comprehension assessments. Teachers added that learners may not be able to advance to the next year level under the same program if learners remain poor in comprehension as they are required to meet certain grades.

With the aforementioned problems, researchers investigated factors that could be related to Chinese language listening and reading comprehension. Kandambi (2020) found that lack of motivation of students to learn Chinese language, and the lack of teaching methods to motivate the learners were found to have caused several educational dilemmas. Rahman et al. (2022) also linked English to learning CFL. They observed that most of the international students learning a third language use English to bridge and learn another language. Furthermore, they also discovered from their study that learning Chinese as a third language is significantly influenced by the factors relating to motivation, fluency in the lingua franca (English in the case of their respondents), attitude, and behavioral control. Similarly, Fang and Baker (2018) stressed that proficiency in English might be necessary for studying the target language because it is often used as a lingua franca when learning Chinese.

Studies on the correlation between English proficiency, foreign language learning motivation to Chinese language listening and reading comprehension of Junior High School in the Philippines need in-depth attention because the researcher has not found any locally existing study on the said variables. Hence, this study intends to address the gap in the area of CFL and develop our understanding of the relationship among these variables as well as to provide understanding among language teachers about the significance of the aforementioned correlation and encourage them to consider these factors in the field of language education.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research study utilized the quantitative research method specifically descriptive-correlational approach. Furthermore, this method is utilized to investigate relationships between

variables in order to objectively test theories. In this research, descriptive-correlational method is the suitable design to be employed because the study aimed to describe the English proficiency, foreign language learning motivation and the Chinese language listening and reading comprehension of the students using numerical data that was statistically analyzed. Further, it aimed to determine whether the English proficiency and foreign language learning motivation significantly correlate with the Chinese language listening and reading comprehension of junior high school students.

Research Locale

This study was conducted in the province of Davao del Sur. Six public schools were selected because these schools offer Special Program in Foreign Language - Chinese Mandarin to junior high school students governed by the Department of Education. To observe anonymity, the schools were coded as schools A, B, C, D, E and F.

Research Respondents

The study had 216 Grade 7 students enrolled in the school year 2022-2023 as respondents. They were determined using Census or also known as complete enumeration. Relatively, this sampling strategy is suitable for the study because it aimed to gather data from all Grade 7 students in the province of Davao del Sur. In such case, among public secondary schools in the said Province, the school A, B, C, D, E and F are the existing schools that offer Special Program in Foreign Language - Chinese Mandarin to junior high school students governed by the Department of Education.

Students were chosen as respondents since they qualified with the criteria set by the researcher. The following inclusion criteria were considered during the conduct of the study. First, respondents must be enrolled to Special Program in Foreign Language specifically Chinese Mandarin in the school year 2022-2023 regardless of age, gender and section in the public school of Davao Del Sur, Philippines. Students from other year levels are excluded. Second, the schools where the respondents are currently enrolled are willing to participate in the research. Learners who failed to enroll in SPFL - Chinese Mandarin program from the beginning of the school year and just happened to shift to the said program after a month or more were excluded from the study as they already missed Chinese Mandarin lessons. Moreover, selected respondents were informed for their right to decide whether or not to participate in the survey. The option to withdraw from the study at any point was also informed to all the respondents.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher obtained ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee and permission from the graduate school dean before conducting the study. After being granted with the requests, the researcher then obtained authorization from the DepEd Davao del Sur Division Office and Digos City Division Office. Upon the completion of these important steps, the researcher then sought an approval from the principals of the selected schools.

After securing all the necessary authorizations, the researcher asked permission from the respondents to carry out the study following the proper protocol and guidelines given by the DepEd Davao del Sur Division Office and Digos City Division Office. The respondents were informed of study objectives and procedures. They were also given informed consent. By then, the researcher administered the questionnaire and assisted the respondents in answering the questionnaires. Since full in-person classes are already allowed, the test was conducted in full face-to-face adhering all the rules given. Health and safety protocols were also observed upon the administration of the tests for the safety of the respondents. The researcher then informed the respondents that they must complete the

questionnaire to assess English proficiency, Foreign Language Learning Motivation survey and Youth Chinese Test I which will focus on listening and reading comprehension, all of which were answerable in less than an hour each section. Finally, completed survey questionnaires were gathered personally by the researcher. The information and data from the tests were handled by the researcher with the utmost confidentially and importance.

Statistical Tools

The following statistical tools were used in the computation of data:

Mean. This statistical tool was used in determining students' English Proficiency, Foreign Language Learning Motivation and Chinese language listening and reading comprehension of the junior high school students.

Standard Deviation. This was used in determining how spread out, how far or how close the students' responses is in relation to the mean.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r). This was used in determining any significant relationships of English Proficiency and Foreign Language Learning to Chinese language listening and reading comprehension of the junior high school students.

Multiple Regression Analysis. This was used for finding the significant influence of students' English Proficiency and Foreign Language Learning Motivation to their Chinese language listening and reading comprehension of the junior high school students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of English Proficiency of Junior High School Students

Table 1 shows the level of English proficiency of the Junior High School (JHS) Students. Four indicators of English proficiency are presented on the table with the indicators including speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Results show that the overall mean is 3.89 which is described as high. It is interpreted that the English proficiency of the JHS is oftentimes evident. This result concurs with the findings of Andes' (2019) who revealed that students' language proficiency levels in listening, speaking, reading, and writing were all described as outstanding. However, the high level of English proficiency found in the current study does not align with the findings of Fernandez (2020) which showed that the grade 7 participants were only in the level of approaching proficiency in terms of their English proficiency. Also, it contradicts Jugo's (2020) findings which revealed that the majority of Filipino undergraduate respondents had a low rating in English proficiency test, while some got a very low score. Only very few among the respondents scored high to very high. The respondents' mean marked score is 40.98 indicating an average performance on the English proficiency exam.

Table 1
Level of English Proficiency of the Junior High School Students

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
1.1 Speaking	3.73	0.721	High
1.2 Listening	4.10	0.651	High
1.3 Reading	4.06	0.621	High
1.4 Writing	3.67	0.580	High
Overall Mean	**3.89**	**0.53**	**High**

The general findings of this variable indicate interconnection among the four indicators as shown in the close results in terms of mean scores, thus, it run parallel to the previous study of Nam (2018) in which he stated that language is seen as a whole entity composed of four basic language skills; writing, speaking, reading, and listening skills that are linked and interconnected to each other. Nam further added that the development of a specific language skill is the outcome of efficient collaboration with other skills.

In a similar lens, Lumettu and Runtuwene (2018) also highlighted that to be proficient in English entails being skilled in four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which cannot be separated since the advancement of one skill contributes to the improvement of the others.

Level of Foreign Language Learning Motivation of Junior High School Students

The data in Table 2 presents the level of Foreign Language Learning Motivation (FLLM) of junior high school students. Shown on the table below the indicators namely, desire for career and economic enhancement, desire to be a global citizen, desire to communicate and affiliate with foreigners, desire for self-satisfaction in learning, self-efficacy, and desire for cultural integration with its corresponding mean and standard deviation. The results revealed a high level of FLLM with an overall mean score of 4.12 described as high. This denotes that the FLLM of the JHS students is oftentimes evident. This coincides with the findings of Cai and Lynch (2017), who conducted a study among Grade 9 students learning Chinese as a foreign language and found that the respondents' overall level of motivation for learning Chinese as a foreign language was high.

Furthermore, it also matches with the findings of Aatif (2022) in the study of Arab learners' motivation to learn a foreign language. He discovered that respondents have favorable views and motivations to study Chinese language. He also revealed that the integrative orientations of the respondents are higher than their instrumental orientations. The result of the present study also run parallel to the findings of Quintos (2022) when she revealed that Filipino learners of foreign language specifically Korean language agreed to be motivated as indicated on the six components of foreign language learning motivation developed by Gonzales (2010).

Table 2
Level of Foreign Language Learning Motivation of the Junior High School Students

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
2.1 Desire for Career and Economic Enhancement	4.43	.477	Very high
2.2 Desire to be a Global Citizen	4.40	.449	Very high
2.3 Desire to Communicate and Affiliate with Foreigners	4.27	.507	Very high
2.4 Desire for Self-satisfaction in Learning	4.00	.597	High
2.5 Self-efficacy	3.71	.636	High
2.6 Desire for Cultural Integration	3.88	0.682	High
Overall Mean	**4.12**	**0.425**	**High**

Level of Chinese Language Listening Comprehension of Junior High School Students

Presented in Table 3 is the level of Chinese Language Listening Comprehension of junior high school students. The table presented a unidimensional finding of the level of Chinese Language

Listening Comprehension of Junior High School students. Because it is a unidimensional variable, only Chinese language listening comprehension is indicated. As depicted in the table, the Chinese language listening comprehension obtained an overall mean score of 68.40 described as low. This signifies that the Chinese language listening comprehension of the junior high school students is in intermediate level.

The low score affirms the claim of Osborne (2020) who stressed that listening comprehension appeared to be one of the most challenging areas in Chinese as Foreign Language learning. Also, Cui's (2021) research on Grade 7 students learning Chinese as a Foreign Language in Thailand found that students' Chinese listening achievement measured using the Youth Chinese Test was only satisfactory. This group of students were taught using a monolingual teaching method in their CFL class. The scores of the respondents suggested a passing rate but did not demonstrate high proficiency in Chinese listening comprehension.

Table 3
Level of Chinese Language Listening Comprehension of Junior High School Students

Domain	Mean	SD	Description
Chinese language listening comprehension	68.40	14.463	Low

Similarly, the result of this current study implies that the students' Chinese language listening comprehension is only adequate for passing the standardized exam and is interpreted as intermediate. Despite being considered adequate, the results indicate that the students' Chinese language listening comprehension requires intervention in order to exceed the borderline passing score.

Level of Chinese Language Reading Comprehension of Junior High School Students

Presented in Table 4 is the level of Chinese language reading comprehension of junior high school students. Similar to listening, the Chinese language reading comprehension part is also unidimensional, there is no indicator being specified, but the Chinese language reading comprehension. As depicted in the table, the Chinese language reading comprehension obtained an overall mean score of 69.22 described as low. The result shows that the Chinese language reading comprehension of the junior high school students is in intermediate level. The findings of this study indicating the low level of Chinese language reading comprehension of the students

Table 4
Level of Chinese Language Reading Comprehension of Junior High School Students

Domain	Mean	SD	Description
Chinese language reading comprehension	69.22	17.730	Low

support Zhang's (2021) assertion that reading Chinese as a second or foreign language is a rigorous mental activity that causes the learners difficulties in learning the language. She further emphasized that it is challenging for learners of Chinese as a foreign language to develop Chinese reading comprehension because some foreign language readers have poor word processing skills. The study of

Eze and Ejiofor (2019) in Nigeria exploring the problems that students met in learning Chinese as second/foreign language showed the different difficulties students face in Nigeria when studying CFL. According to the study's findings, 58% of respondents claimed to have difficulty understanding Chinese grammar, 46% claimed to have a limited understanding of Chinese culture, and 46% of all respondents agreed that stress and anxiety had an impact on their ability to comprehend Chinese text. These reading-related problems are considered to hinder the students' ability to comprehend what they read.

In the same way, the results of this study reveal that the Chinese language reading comprehension of the junior high school students is only in the intermediate level and does not manifest high proficiency in Chinese.

Correlation between Variables

Presented in Table 5 is the test of relationship of English Proficiency and FLLM with Chinese language listening and reading comprehension of Junior High School students. The result show that both of the independent variables have significant and positive relationship with the Chinese language listening and reading comprehension ($p < 0.05$). In particular, there is a significant and positive relationship between English proficiency and Chinese language listening and reading comprehension of Junior High School students (r-value of 0.277, $p < 0.05$). This suggest that the increase in English proficiency would also likely increase the Chinese language

Table 5
Correlation between Variables

Independent Variables	r	CLLRC p-value	Remarks
English Proficiency	. 277	.000	Significant
FLLM	.284	.000	Significant

listening and reading comprehension among JHS students. This result run parallel to the study of Osborne (2020), who found that English proficiency and the frequent usage of English in the educational environment has a substantial influence on learning Chinese as Foreign Language. The numerous techniques and strategies devised by CFL learners in the process of CFL learning indicated the positive influence performed by their metalinguistic awareness. Further, it also agrees to the discovery of Hoti et al. (2011) on the impact of English language skills on third language acquisition (foreign language) when they found that learners' English skills positively influenced the learners' foreign language listening and reading skills along with the contribution of their reading skill in the local language of instruction.

Additionally, the result agrees with Hammarberg (2001), who claimed that a learner's high previous language proficiency influences their level of metalinguistic awareness, which may have an impact on their acquisition of a foreign language. Therefore, it may be inferred that previous language proficiency influences the acquisition of a foreign language. In the context of this study, English proficiency is a significant factor that impacts on Chinese as foreign language specifically the listening and reading comprehension of learners.

In the same way, the foreign language learning motivation has a significant and positive relationship with Chinese language listening and reading comprehension of Junior High School students (r-value of 0.284, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that the increase in foreign language learning would also likely increase the Chinese language listening and reading comprehension among JHS students. This result agrees with the results of a study conducted by Cai and Lynch (2017) among Thai

students showed a significant relationship between learners' motivation for learning a foreign language and Chinese listening and reading, and writing skills of the learners.

Determinants of the Chinese Language Listening and Reading Comprehension

Table 6 determined the influence of English proficiency and foreign language learning motivation on the Chinese language listening and reading comprehension. The results revealed that both English Proficiency and FLLM are significant predictors of the Chinese language listening and reading comprehension.

In particular, English proficiency has positive and significant influence on Chinese language listening and reading comprehension of the JHS students ($\beta = .194$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, for every unit increase in English proficiency, there is a corresponding increase in the Chinese language listening and reading comprehension by .194, presuming all other factors remain constant. This denotes that English Proficiency positively contributes to the CLLRC. Similarly,

Table 6
Significant Influence of Independent Variables

	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	p-value	Interpretation
English Proficiency	.194	2.755	.006	Significant
FLLM	.206	2.922	.004	Significant
R =.335 R Square = .112 F = 13.481 p value = .000				

foreign language learning motivation has positive and significant influence on Chinese language listening and reading comprehension of the JHS students ($\beta = .206$, $p < 0.05$). Accordingly, a rise in foreign language learning motivation is expected to improve students' Chinese language listening and reading comprehension by 0.206.

The significant influence of English proficiency and FLLM to the CLLRC as established in the results supports Gardner's (2010) socio-educational model which claimed that both cognitive and affective components are involved in learning a second or foreign language. In this study, the English proficiency is viewed as the cognitive element that contributes on the language acquisition of the learners. Meanwhile, the foreign language learning motivation is regarded as the affective factor. It can be implied that learners who are very motivated to learn a foreign language and who have high level of linguistic proficiency are perceived to learn a language efficiently.

Meanwhile, the model explains 11.2 % of the variance of Chinese language learning and reading comprehension. This means that 88.8 of the variance of Chinese language learning and reading comprehension can be attributed to other factors aside from English proficiency and foreign language learning motivation. The study of Zhang (2021) found that Chinese reading is essentially a language-based, cognitively restricted and personalized activity involving a variety of factors such as linguistic, psychological, textual, contextual, and background aspects.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study show that the junior high school students have a high level of English proficiency across all four domains namely; speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. This implies that the junior high school students enrolled in Chinese Mandarin class are highly proficient in English language indicating that the students are capable of communicating very well using the English language. Similarly, the results also show that the level of the foreign language learning motivation of the junior high school students is high. This implies that the junior high school students have high orientation toward the goal of acquiring a foreign language.

Contrary to the mentioned variables, the level of the Chinese language listening and reading comprehension of the junior high school students is found low and interpreted to be under intermediate level. However, the respondents' mean score is considered to have passed the test based on the Youth Chinese Test (YCT) guidelines. Passing the YCT test implies that the learners can already comprehend and apply some of the most commonly used Chinese phrases and words in communicative settings, as well as demonstrate the capacity to advance one's Chinese language learning.

Additionally, the findings revealed that English proficiency and foreign language learning motivation have significant relationship with the Chinese language listening and reading comprehension. It further indicates that the two variables; English proficiency and foreign language learning motivation are factors that affect Chinese language listening and reading comprehension. Hence, the current findings approve Gardner's socio-educational model (2010), and Language transfer of Selinker (1972). It can be concluded that both English Proficiency and FLLM are significant predictors of the Chinese language listening and reading comprehension.

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