English Language Acquisition among Non-Native Speakers

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Abstract: - As a monolingual country, it is interesting to study how undergraduate students in China learn foreign languages effectively during their four years at a university. This study aims to examine the duration of learning and mastery of English language among students in a university in Beijing. The research also examine whether there were significant differences between the respondents’ background with their English proficiency. The number of respondents that participated in the research consists of 117 students enrolled in an English program. The study found that almost half of the students spent two years (22 persons, 19.5%) and 3 years (23 persons, 20.4%) to master English. The one way ANOVA showed that there were significant differences in learning English among the respondents according to the time used to speak English outside the classroom, the importance of the English language as perceived by the students, and the English proficiency level of the students. Universities can adopt more effective approaches to improve the learning of English based on the results of the study.

Key-Words: - English language acquisition, strategy inventory for language learning, monolingual culture.

1 Introduction

China is one of the countries which have adopted a monolingual policy in all aspects of administration. However, globalization has led to a paradigm shift in education. There are more students who are learning other foreign languages. In higher education institutions, English has become the most important foreign language since the 1950s, replacing the Russian language. China’s National Language Policy has three main goals: improving literacy, ensuring internal security, and strengthening the country through acquisition of scientific knowledge and economic development. The policy encouraged citizens to be trilingual: fluent in Putonghua (Mandarin), English and dialect [1]. Since many students learn English in an English-speaking country or a more authentic environment where the language is widely spoken in daily communication, the way they learn English is quite different from the students learning English in China. The natural exposure to spoken English and the amount of time they are exposed to English in an authentic English-speaking environment could easily surpass that of the total amount learned in an entire 10 years of formal English education at China [2][3].

2 Significance of the Study

The results of a study conducted by the University of London showed that students who are bilingual students tend to receive a "brain boost" [4]. There was evidence of advanced learning and stimulation of the brain among students who are bilingual. The researchers believe that language learning help to improve brain power and create advancements in learning. Another study found that learning a second language can help to delay dementia [5]. By learning a second language it is possible to keep the brain functioning better and longer. A second language can also provide the learner or speaker with many different job opportunities.

The emergence of China as a global economic power has led many in China to realize the importance of learning English as the international status of the language can lead to academic success and open up job opportunities. Students at the universities are eagerly learning English to improve their academic achievement and further their studies overseas. As such, it is important for us to have a better understanding of the duration of time that the students need to be proficient in the language and