Analyzing three generations of Taiwanese EFL learners’ narratives: How localization and globalization meet?

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The beginning stages of English learning in the sociocultural context of Taiwan, perhaps similar to other EFL countries in Asia that are under the influence of Confucianism, can be complex. Such ‘a foreign language in the local context’ learning experiences cannot be just a matter of individual endeavor but also, more importantly, a significant culturally organized practice that aims for globalization. Through a theoretical framework that corroborates the Vygotskian sociocultural perspective and Eastern learning models, this study is interested in how three generations of English learners discuss the early stages of their English learning in their particular sociocultural contexts and how the similarities and differences among their experiences may be related to the persistent as well as changing cultural practice toward English learning in the particular socio and historical cultural context of Taiwan. Fifteen participants who are TESOL scholars/professors, graduate students, and undergraduate English majors were invited to provide oral narratives of their English learning journeys. Through thematic analysis, English learning is found to be an important part of the local culture, which, as discussed by Bakhurst (1991) and Cole (1996), has the characteristics of "supra-individual" and "rooted in the historical production of value and significance as realized in shared social practice" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 1). Implications are discussed as an additional issue to the various existing conceptions of learning context in SLA (see Collentine & Freed, 2004): How English, although a foreign language, is actually a culturally organized practice in this Chinese cultural context and an important part of these former and current EFL learners’ life experiences and identities.

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