THE PERCEPTION AND VIABILITY OF ENGLISH CORNER
ON THE AMERICAN CAMPUS

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
December 2014

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Hu, Jiaying. *The Perception and Viability of English Corner on the American Campus.*

Master of Arts (English as Second Language), December 2014, 56 pp., 7 tables, 4 figures, references, 54 titles.

International students are often under considerable pressure from language barriers, culture shock, social isolation and lack of social support in American universities. Those stressors often discourage international students as ESL learners from practicing English with native students on campus. Based on Krashen & Terrell’s subconscious acquisition and conscious learning hypothesis, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, Cummins’ Basic Interpersonal Communication System (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), Horwitz’s language anxiety and Oxford’s indirect learning strategies, this study explores how international students and American students, respectively, perceive English Corner and whether English Corner could be an applicable out-of-class learning environment for international students to practice English and socialize with American students on American campuses. English Corner refers to regular meetings that English learners in Mainland China voluntarily organize in public places to practice spoken English. A survey was conducted on language learning strategies, socialization, acculturation, autonomy and English Corner among international students and native students at the University of North Texas. The questionnaires were adapted from Oxford and Nyikos’ study as to what variables affect choice of language learning strategies, Iheanacho’s study as to how international students use the Morris Library at the University of Delaware and their perception of library services and programs, and Battle’s study as to how information literacy instruction affects library anxiety among international students. The findings of this study may help American universities realize the importance of English Corner as one optimal intervention program for international students and American
students. The support for English Corner may help international students improve their English learning, alleviate their language anxiety and create more opportunities for international students and native students to socialize with each other.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee chair, Dr. Haj Ross, for his adept direction and support of my study. I very much appreciate the expert guidance provided by Dr. Robert Wilson during my thesis process. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Jiangping Chen for her strong support of my study.

I wish to thank Intensive English Language Institute, Ms. Xiaoxing Liu from the Department of Math, and Ms. Monica Ng from the Department of Linguistics and Technical Communications for supporting my data collection. Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Dr. Yunfei Du, my son, Jimmy Du, and my daughter, Rosie Du, for their support of my study.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.......................................................................................................................... iii

LIST OF TABLES ......................................................................................................................................... vi

LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................................................................... 5

2.1. English Corner ............................................................................................................................... 5
   2.1.1. Historical Background and Definition .................................................................................... 5
   2.1.2. English Corners in China and America ................................................................................... 6
   2.1.3. Features of English Corner ..................................................................................................... 7
   2.1.4. A Standard English Corner .................................................................................................... 9

2.2. Indirect Learning Strategies ........................................................................................................... 10

2.3. Out-of-Classroom Language Learning ......................................................................................... 12

2.4. The Scaffolding of English Corner ............................................................................................... 13

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY .................................................................................................................. 18

3.1. Data Collection .............................................................................................................................. 18
   3.1.1. International Students ........................................................................................................... 18
   3.1.2. American Students ............................................................................................................... 19

3.2. Survey and Data Collection .......................................................................................................... 19

3.3. Data Analysis .................................................................................................................................. 20

CHAPTER 4 DISCUSSION .......................................................................................................................... 31

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION ...................................................................................................................... 36

APPENDIX A IRB APPROVAL LETTER .............................................................................................. 38
**LIST OF TABLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1</th>
<th>The Barriers Affecting English Practice</th>
<th>22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>Rank English Practice Choices</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Rank Natural Settings for Practicing English with Native Speakers</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4</td>
<td>Familiarity with English Corner</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.5</td>
<td>The Preferred English Corner</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.6</td>
<td>English Corner as Evaluated by American Students</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.7</td>
<td>The Number of Times per Week that Students can Go to English Corner</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1</td>
<td>Distribution of students</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.2</td>
<td>The first two columns in language barriers</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.3</td>
<td>The first two columns of English practice</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.4</td>
<td>Natural settings for English</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Language barriers, culture shock, social isolation, and lack of social support often put international students under considerable pressure, which affects their academic success in American institutions. According to Open Doors 2013, a report that was released from the Institute of International Education, 819,644 international students studied in the United States in the 2012/2013 academic year (Open Doors Data 2011/12-2012/13). Most of those students were from non-English speaking countries. Even though some countries use English as one of their official languages, people still use their native languages to communicate with each other. So when international students come to the United States, most of them are facing language challenges.

Apaibanditkul (2006) found in his research that the language barrier is the primary factor that causes international students anxiety in American universities. Robertson et al. (2000) also reported in his study that the language barrier and lack of confidence prevented international students from participating in social activities on American campuses. In order to alleviate stresses among international students, American institutions need first to help international students conquer language challenges.

New international students need language learning activities that are especially designed for their language levels and learning abilities. Obviously, international students learn their English in their classes; however, time and opportunities in class are not enough for them to improve their English proficiency. Many researchers in English as Second Language (ESL) believe that out-of-classroom activities are beneficial for ESL learners. Out-of-classroom activities mainly include: reading English books, magazines or newspapers, watching English movies or TV, participating in community events, traveling, and having a language partner.
Reading and watching movies or TV can help increase international students’ reading and listening comprehension, but international students have to interact with native people in order to improve their speaking skills. Students in a language institute are sometimes assigned a language partner. However, language partners are volunteers, and there are not enough volunteers for all international students.

Because of language barriers and culture shock, international students – especially new students – are scared to talk to native people by themselves. They worry about whether native people will understand them or laugh at their mistakes. These psychological concerns stop many international students from looking for opportunities to practice English with native people. Ingram (2005) found that homestay experiences were of particular interest to students when studying abroad. However, not all international students are lucky enough to find American host families. Because of psychological concerns and lack of practice opportunities, many international students have difficulties in speaking English. American universities need to create more effective language-learning activities for new international students.

In addition to being a source of needed revenue, international students contribute to intercultural learning and increased understanding of diversity and global issues (NAFSA 2003). In March 2014, during her trip to China, Michelle Obama said that when it comes to the defining challenges of our time – whether it’s climate change or economic opportunity or the spread of nuclear weapons – these are shared challenges, and no one country can confront them alone.

When the world is globalizing, it’s very crucial to learn other languages, cultures and societies. International students bring their native languages and cultures to American universities; American students can socialize with international students to learn foreign languages and cultures from them (Inside Higher ED, 2014). Brebner (2008) found in her study that interaction...
with international students helped local students increase their cultural awareness and expand their worldview, leading to a better understanding and appreciation of and even sympathy towards international students.

In order to help students socialize with each other after class, many American institutions have instituted group activities such as: sports events, concerts, cultural festivals, or academic lectures on campus. Both American students and international students then have a chance to get to know each other during those activities, and international students get lots of English practice with native students. Still, due to cultural differences, quite a number of international students are not interested in American sports and music and prefer staying in their dormitories over attending those sports or music events on campus.

Asian students socialize more with each other and participate in fewer diversity-related college activities than other international students. Student affairs personnel might design programs and activities to promote the mingling of Asian international students with other students of different backgrounds (Zhao, et al. 2005). Relationships with domestic students have been found to have a positive impact on international students' successful adjustment to a new country (Shigaki & Smith 1997). Researchers have suggested that intervention programs can foster connection between international students and domestic students and provide participants with an opportunity to interact with each other in a relaxed atmosphere (e.g., Sakurai, et al. 2010).

English Corner has been used widely as a successful out-of-classroom activity in China. No research has ever discussed the feasibility of English Corner as an intervention program for American campuses. This study has tried to fill in that gap by investigating whether English
Corner could be a viable out-of-classroom activity to facilitate international students’ English studies and motivate the interaction of international students with American students.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. English Corner

Quite a few researchers have conducted studies on English Corner in Mainland China; however, few studies on English Corner in America have been found. Access to the studies done by Chinese scholars is limited because most of studies were written in Chinese and published in Chinese journals. The following review of English Corner is based on the few articles present in American Journals.

2.1.1. Historical Background and Definition

There is little written about the origin of English Corner. Christian missionaries might have used it to develop the linguistic skills and cultural awareness of their congregations and future local church leaders two hundred years ago; then, at some point, English Corner started to be used by the public (Kellaway, 2013). After China’s entry into World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, English study became a hotter and hotter topic in China. One of the more popular phenomena reflecting the fever of English study in China is the formation of English Corner.

In China, classroom education is focused on English reading and writing skills, and students have no chance to practice speaking and listening skills. Gradually, Chinese English learners have come to understand the importance of English speaking and listening skills. In response, secondary and university students have started English Corners to practice English with foreign teachers, English-speaking guests, or each other. Later on, non-student English learners organized English Corners in cities. The English Corner at the Renmin University of China is the best-known (Wu & Su, 2009).
Jin and Cortazzi (2002) said that English Corners are weekly gatherings held in a park, a square, or at a street corner, where secondary and university students create their own learning environments with each other as well as passers-by in order to practice English. The University of Toledo defines English Corner as a fun, free, informal weekly time of tutoring for international students and their spouses. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign describes English Corner as a weekly meeting, giving international students an opportunity to practice English with American students in a comfortable setting. Missouri State University regards English Corner as an opportunity for students to discuss culture, practice their English skills and make new friends.

2.1.2. English Corners in China and America

There are 60 famous and popular English Corners in big cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Dalian, and Guangzhou. There are also lots of English Corners in small cities and local universities and schools (Wu & Su, 2009). Some English learners volunteered to run English Corners as a full-time job. In Shenzhen city, Guangzhou province, Gu Peihong was selected as one of the district’s top 10 volunteers in 2012 among more than 40,000 candidates as a result of her running a free weekly English Corner for eight years. Activities in her English Corner included teaching inspirational aphorisms, singing English songs, making short speeches, and having group discussions. She said that English Corner is not just about language learning, and is also a stage where participants can gain confidence that will help them through the ups and downs in their lives (Shenzhen Daily, 2012).

The Office of International Student Services in the University of Toledo is running four English Corners on campus for international students as well as their spouses and children. Every English Corner meets in a classroom one time each week. The three of them meet at different
times. Each week, a student could attend three English Corners if they desired to do so. They have several American helpers to break up larger groups for more personal conversation practice. They also usually have some light refreshments for the participants. Their activities include playing games in English, watching video clips and discussing them, sharing about cross-cultural topics, going on field trips, and participating in fun events like picnics and cookouts.

The Office of International Programs at Missouri State University organizes English Corners for their international students and Americans at 4:00 p.m. every other Friday to create opportunities for students to discuss cultures, practice English skills and make new friends. Their English Corner is in the center lobby.

The Department of Linguistics in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign organizes an English Corner that is sponsored by the Christian Campus Fellowship. Their English Corner takes place every Monday from 4:00 pm to 5:30 pm at Campus House. The purpose of their English Corner is to give international students an opportunity to practice English with American students in a comfortable setting. English Corner is one of their social gatherings for students.

2.1.3. Features of English Corner

Wu and Su (2009) summarized the main features of the English Corner in his article about the Renmin University of China, one of the biggest English Corners. He notes that many English Corners are spontaneously formed while others are set up on purpose. The English Corner at the Renmin University of China has the following features, which make it a most attractive one to English learners:

- Convenient physical location: It is easy to see and is in a quiet place without much noise from the outside.
• ESL learners with different education backgrounds: Here, English learners can find partners with the similar backgrounds, which helps their communication continue improving while also allowing for the chance to share different life experiences.
  
  o This feature is considered to be the most important benefit of that English Corner.

• The presence of foreigners: English learners can have a chance to practice English with native speakers.

• Brand-new activities: The members take turns hosting activities, selecting topics, preparing details, and organizing the participants to make it easier for them to join in the discussion.

  Gao (2009) points out that English Corner is a friendly and supportive learning community, where learners’ autonomous learning efforts are motivated as they take the initiative in transforming their knowledge into these kinds of language-learning experiences. In his study, the participants ran the English club similar to English Corner by creating a website, organizing outings and dinner gatherings, or offering speeches in English, or singing contests.

  Kellaway (2013) mentions in his study that peer learners in English Corner in China have similar backgrounds. Most of the participants have similar English language abilities. They are more accepting, and don’t judge negatively, the language levels of other learners. English Corners in American universities, on the other hand, have the following main characteristics:

  • A weekly meeting in a place on campus
  
  • Opportunities for international students to practice English and make friends with American students
  
  • An institutionally established international office or a linguistics department which has the responsibility to organize English Corners
Various activities such as playing games, watching video clips, joining in discussions, or going on field trips

Bull and Beck (2009) define English Corner as a framework for collaboration in their research. In their view, the framework has three key phases: cultural orientation, tutor guidance and mentoring. They emphasized the importance of understanding different cultures, peer-led activities and student mentoring services in an online English Corner.

2.1.4. A Standard English Corner

Generalizing from all the studies discussed above, Standard English Corners should have these main features:

- A convenient physical location without much noise
- Regular meetings
- Free participation for English learners and native speakers
- Turn-taking during conversation
- Free chat with topics suggested by the organizers
- 1 to 2 hours for each meeting
- Various activities, such as games, watching video clips, discussions, field trips or picnics
- Connections to social media, such as Facebook or Twitter
- Direction by participants with the support of an organization

Various research studies focusing on the tertiary institutions in mainland China pointed out that English Corner had not only provided a relaxing environment for students, but it had also boosted their confidence in using English to communicate with their peers (Lam, 2011). The benefits of English Corner discussed in the following paragraphs concern English Corner and linguistic theories supporting this practice.
Much research has been carried out, attempting to identify what good language-learning strategies might be and the relationship between good language-learning strategies and successful language-learning. Oxford and Nyikos (1989) mention in their article that the use of appropriate learning strategies enables students to take responsibility for their learning by enhancing learner autonomy, independence, and self-direction, especially in an informal setting.

O’Malley and Chamot (1985) carried out a study on learning strategies used by beginning and intermediate ESL students. In their study, language-learning strategies were divided into three main categories: metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective. They found that the strategies students used most often tended to require little cognitive processing of the learning material, and that metacognitive, affective, and social strategies influenced ESL beginners and intermediate learners.

Oxford (1990) concluded that cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of language-learning strategies enhanced learners’ language-learning proficiency and self-confidence. In her book, Oxford drew up taxonomies of learning strategies and talked about direct learning strategies and indirect learning strategies. Her direct learning strategies are referred to as memory, cognitive and compensation and indirect learning strategies include three types: metacognitive, affective and social.

2.2. Indirect Learning Strategies

Oxford (1990) defined learning strategies as specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations. Her direct and indirect learning strategies can be applied in both formal and informal learning environments. Several indirect sub-strategies are related to out-of-classroom language-learning. She classified the indirect learning strategies as metacognitive, affective, and
social. Metacognitive strategies allow learners to control their cognition through centering, arranging, planning, and evaluating strategies. In short, Metacognitive strategies are used to coordinate the learning process.

There are sixteen specific metacognitive strategies in all and seeking practice opportunities is a very important learning strategy for new language learning. Pursuing speaking opportunities refers to seeking out chances to practice a new language in naturalistic situations, such as joining an international social club or attending a party or going to a second-language cinema. Language learners must personally take responsibility to seek enough opportunities to use target languages, usually through out-of-classroom settings. Affective strategies help regulate emotions, motivations, and attitudes that work together to influence language-learning. There are ten affective strategies in all, and strategies about lowering language anxiety are very useful for ESL beginners. Social strategies help students learn through interaction with others. Social strategies include: asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others.

The six social sub-strategies are very helpful in acquiring language-speaking skills. Asking questions helps learners understand their communication with others better. Cooperative strategies help language learners become more interactive and less receptive to language input in language learning. Empathizing with others helps learners understand each other with more patience while also allowing learners to feel less stressed, thus diminishing language anxiety.

In English Corner, participants mainly seek practice opportunities with others who are at a similar level of English or native speakers who have the patience to understand their level of English. In turn, ESL learners feel comfortable about developing their early language production. English Corner is run by a student group with advice from faculty or staff members. Lots of
activities at English Corner are designed by the students themselves, so they are motivated to attend English Corner.

Motivation is the single most powerful influence on the choice of language-learning strategies, which determine “the extent to which the individual will actively involve themselves in learning the language” (Gardner, 1985). The use of learning strategies is related primarily to the attitude of the language learner and unrelated to his language learning aptitude, so language learners who are particularly motivated to master the language will engage in these strategies (Bialystok, 1981). Rubin (1975) and Gardner and Lambert (1959) and Macnamara (1971) also discussed the importance of motivation for language learners in their studies. Research shows that without special encouragement, language learners do not typically tend to use cooperative strategies (Reid, 1987, O’Malley et al. 1985).

In addition to the good language-learning strategies, learning environments also make a difference in language learning. Traditional language learning is conducted in classrooms, and many studies have proven that out-of-classroom language learning is necessary for successful second language acquisition.

2.3. Out-of-Classroom Language Learning

Benson (2001) defined out-of-classroom learning as any type of learning outside the classroom which includes “self-instruction, naturalistic learning or self-directed naturalistic learning” (p. 62). In Benson’s article, the phrase “self-directed naturalistic learning” is used to indicate that language learners create or seek out a situation where they would be exposed to the language but may not concentrate directly on language learning while engaged in the activity. Rubin (1975:44-45) identified out-of-class strategies as one characteristic of a good language learner; language learners should seek out opportunities to use the target language. Krashen
(1976) indicated that both formal and informal linguistic environments contribute to second language proficiency in different ways. Pickard (1996) gave a list of studies on out-of-class learning strategies. On the list were studies from Rubin (1975), Naiman et al. (1978), Bialystok (1978, 1981), Huang and Naerssen (1987), and Elley and Mangubhai (1983). Functional practice in Bialystok’s study (1981:25) aims to achieve exposure to meaningful language by using the language for communication while watching movies, reading books, or talking to native speakers. All other scholars proved that out-of-class learning strategies were very helpful for language learning. Murry (2010) identified the following findings in her dissertation about language learning outside of the classroom:

- Meaningful connection with native speakers is not automatic simply through immersion; it requires initiatives from language learners.
- Language educators can devise structured learning in a classroom to prepare students for out-of-class learning activities.
- Administrators of institutions should create opportunities for incoming international students to practice their English outside the classroom.

In Shresta’s article (1998), he proposed two SLA approaches: formal classroom instruction and informal natural exposure, and he found that the formal classroom instruction promoted accuracy and the informal natural exposure enhanced fluency. These several linguists’ theories may explain why English Corner as an out-of-classroom activity helps ESL learners with their English study.

2.4. The Scaffolding of English Corner

English Corner sets the framework for participation and assists language production within ZPD. Vygotsky (1978) proposed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) when he
talked about interaction between learning and development. He defined ZPD as “the distance between the actual developmental level (as determined by independent problem-solving) and the level of potential development (as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers).” He believed that learning could awaken a variety of internal developmental processes that could operate only when a child was interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers within the Zone of Proximal Development. In other words, when a learner is in the ZPD for a special task, the learner can achieve the task with the appropriate assistance. Wood, et al. (1976, p. 90) introduce a similar concept known as Scaffolding. Pea (2004) explained in his article that Scaffolding can be conceived of as a structure, guided in specific form based on learners’ independent capacities and needs, or temporarily assisting learners with production until learners can self-sufficiently complete tasks on their own. The “Scaffolding” processes includes: recruitment of learners’ attention, limitation of freedom in the task to manageable levels, maintenance of “direction” in problem-solving, marking critical features, frustration-controlling, and solution demonstration.

Once learners master a task with the benefit of scaffolding, the scaffolding can be removed and the learners will be able to complete the task on their own. English Corner is a semi-structured activity for speaking English. Usually, participants are divided into several groups. In each group, members stand in a circle with a native speaker standing in the center. Native speakers usually tend to give each member a chance to talk in English. At English Corner, ESL learners feel comfortable practicing English with other people, because they are sure to have equal opportunities to practice English. With equal opportunities for all the participants, English Corner is set up under the guidance of professionals and academic administrators. Activities are designed based on the ESL learners’ English level and learning capability and are
guided by the organizers, so all participation at an English Corner is controlled to a manageable level. The controlled participation at English Corner arouses learners’ internal developmental processes in language learning and advances their English skills within ZPD.

English Corner can be considered as an optimal intervention program for reducing language anxiety in a less stressful environment. Horwitz (1986) defined anxiety as the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system and also summarized the effects of anxiety on language learning as follows:

- More anxious students tend to avoid attempting difficult or personal messages in the target language.
- Anxious students may avoid studying and in some cases skip class entirely in an effort to alleviate their anxiety.
- The resulting poor test performance and inability to perform in class can contribute to a teacher's inaccurate assessment to the effect that a student with anxiety lacks either sufficient aptitude for learning a language or sufficient motivation to do the necessary work for a good performance.

She analyzed three kinds of anxieties in foreign language-learning: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. In her study identifying foreign language anxiety, she found it to be very important to create a student support system to identify specific sources of student anxiety and to offer optimal intervention programs to alleviate student anxiety. Krashen's input hypothesis states that second language acquisition is a function of comprehensible input designed to convey a message in low-anxiety situations (Krashen, 1985). English Corner is designed for ESL learners, especially the ESL beginners, to practice English.
with their peers or native speakers. Because all the participants intend to choose conversation topics that are interesting and understandable to most speakers and because most of the time ESL learners are patient with each other at English Corner, ESL learners are able practice English at English Corner with less frustration.

English Corner could be a bridge to help Asian students feel comfortable and get used to participating in the classroom. Cummins (1979) introduced Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in language-learning. BICS refers to conversational fluency in a language while CALP refers to students’ ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school (Cummins, 2008). BICS is applied to contextual tasks and practical activities in which learners use external clues and information such as facial gestures, real objects, and pictorial representation to enable understanding; while with CALP, learners rely on linguistic cues and knowledge about language and text to understand meanings. BICS is involved in social interaction most of the time and is appropriate for beginners because beginners need external clues to scaffold their understanding of meaning as well as their production in speaking tasks. CALP is more academic and better for advanced learners because they can use their language abilities and knowledge to understand meaning and complete speaking or written tasks. In terms of BICS and CALP, English Corner provides opportunities for ESL beginners to strengthen their BICS while they develop their CALP. At English Corner, ESL learners practice English face-to-face with their peers, which certainly helps with their conversational fluency. In eastern Asian countries, language-learning is receptive most of the time in class, and many Asian students are not familiar with Western learning styles, in which there is an expectation of lots of participation from students in class.
At English Corner, ESL learners practice participation skills and develop their conversational fluency so that they can get more confidence in participating in classroom activities. According to the above theories about second language learning, English Corner should theoretically provide a very helpful out-of-classroom learning activity. In China, many studies have shown that English Corner has been proven very useful in ESL learning. In recent years, some American universities have set up English Corners on their campuses as well. Is English Corner really helpful to ESL learning on American campuses too? How do both international students and American students perceive English Corner? In order to find the answer to these questions, I did the following study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The study explored how applicable an English Corner might be as an out-of-classroom learning environment on an American campus, how international students and American students perceive English Corners, and whether they would like to participate in such a specially-designed activity. The following research questions were analyzed in the study:

- What are the perceptions of English Corner among international students and American students in American universities?
- Would English Corner be viable on an American campus?

3.1. Data Collection

3.1.1. International Students

The data for this study was collected at the University of North Texas, which has about 3000 international students, from more than 100 foreign countries. More than 400 new international students are studying English at the UNT Intensive English Language Institute (IELI) every semester. 68 international students from 15 different countries were asked to fill out a voluntary survey in their classrooms. 8 of them were undergraduate students at the University of North Texas (UNT), and 60 were the Level 5 or Level 4 graduate students studying at the UNT Intensive English Language Institute. There were 20 from Islamic countries, 10 from Mainland China, 9 from Japan, 4 from Korea, and the rest were from the other eight countries. Most of these students had been at UNT for less than one year and had been in America anywhere from one to three years. English was a second language for all of them. The students were chosen from Level 4 or Level 5 on purpose, because students from lower levels had
difficulties in filling out the questionnaires due to their limited knowledge of and skills in English. 10 of the 60 IELI students did not complete their surveys.

3.1.2. American Students

One hundred American undergraduates participated in this study. They were from two classes in critical writing and two classes in math. English was the native language of all American participants. They were chosen to participate in the survey to assess their perceptions of English Corner. 22 students from one math class did not fill out the survey completely due to misunderstanding of the instruction. American student respondents were not required to answer questions 9-13, which were intended for international students to answer.

All of the students were given an informed consent form to sign before they began the questionnaires. All of them were told it was a voluntary, not mandatory, survey, and they didn’t need worry about the safety of their personal information, because the survey was anonymous. There were 55 male students and 81 female students among the respondents who completed the surveys. In short, 168 students participated in the survey. 20 of 100 American students misunderstood the survey and provided invalid data, and 12 of the 68 international students did not complete the survey, thereby leaving the total number of valid data sets at 136.

3.2. Survey and Data Collection

There have been no surveys regarding English Corner’s effectiveness on American campuses. The questionnaire for this study was adapted from three prior surveys: Oxford and Nyikos’ study about what variables affect choice of language-learning strategies (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989), Iheanacho’s study about how international students use Morris Library at the University of Delaware and their perception of library services and programs (Iheanacho, 2008),
and Battle’s study about how information literacy instruction affects library anxiety among international students (Battle, 2004).

The first seven survey questions solicited demographic information about their first language and about how long they had been in the US and at the University of North Texas. The following four questions asked about how much time they would be willing to practice English with native students, the barriers affecting English practice with native students, the ways of practicing English, and natural settings in which English can be practiced. The last six questions were multiple choice and concerned English Corner as an out-of-classroom activity. The questions were about the usefulness of out-of-classroom learning activities, whether respondents had heard of English Corner or been to any form of English Corner before, what kind of English Corner they would like to attend, how helpful English Corner would be for American students, and how often they would go to English Corner at the University of North Texas.

The results of this study were based on students’ answers to these questions. The survey was administered from February to April in 2014. Students from different classes were asked to complete their survey in class. During the survey, one whole class misunderstood several questions, so their surveys were invalid. In the end, all the valid data sets were gathered from the 136 respondents. All the data sets were then entered into Excel spreadsheets.

3.3. Data Analysis

Tables and figures are used to present the data in a clear manner with a discussion following each figure or table.
Figure 3.1. Distribution of students.

The data was not biased because it was collected from the 15 different countries above.

More than half of the international respondents were from Japan, China, and the Middle East because nowadays American universities receive international students mostly from those countries (Open Doors Data 2011/12-2012/13).
Table 3.1

*The Barriers Affecting English Practice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very strong</th>
<th>Moderately strong</th>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Somewhat strong</th>
<th>Not strong at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural differences</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfamiliarity with a new country</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My accent</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of opportunities</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen from Table 3.1 and Figure 3.2, international student respondents considered communication skills to be the factors which most strongly affected practicing English with native speakers. They regarded cultural differences as a somewhat strong factor affecting English practice with native speakers, and many of them thought being unfamiliar with a new country only affected their English practice a little. Lack of motivated opportunities was voted as the second strongest factor affecting their English practice.
Table 3.2

*Rank English Practice Choices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank of English practice choices</th>
<th>Number of first choice</th>
<th>Number of second choice</th>
<th>Number of third choice</th>
<th>Number of fourth choice</th>
<th>Number of fifth choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attending Foreign Language films</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking native speakers for conversation</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading authentic materials in English</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working off campus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to authentic materials in English</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 3.2 and Figure 3.3, we can see that seeking native speakers for conversation got the highest number of votes for the first choice and the second choice. Working off campus was least liked by the respondents. Attending foreign films and listening to authentic materials in English got the same total of the first choice and the second choices. These two were voted as the second most important factor in English practice.
Table 3.3

*Rank Natural Settings for Practicing English with Native Speakers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank natural settings for practicing English with native speakers</th>
<th>Number of first choice</th>
<th>Number of second choice</th>
<th>Number of third choice</th>
<th>Number of fourth choice</th>
<th>Number of fifth choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A library</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A park</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A cafeteria</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A cinema</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place on campus specifically organized for English practice with native speakers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*A special place refers a place on campus specifically designated for practicing English with native speakers.

Figure 3.4 and Table 3.3 show that a special place got the highest number of votes as the first choice. A cafeteria got the second highest number of votes. A cinema was the least favorite place for the respondents to practice English with native speakers because audiences are not supposed to talk while watching a film in a theater.
Table 3.4

*Familiarity with English Corner*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have heard of English Corner?</th>
<th>Many times</th>
<th>Three times</th>
<th>Two times</th>
<th>One time</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>numbers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5

*The Preferred English Corner*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Corner in a park</th>
<th>English Corner run by students only</th>
<th>English Corner run by nobody</th>
<th>English Corner in a classroom</th>
<th>English Corner in an open place on campus run by an active team advised by faculty or staff members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.4 shows that most students have never heard of English Corner before. From Table 3.5, we can see the kind of English Corner preferred by most of respondents would be an English Corner in an open place on campus run by an active team advised by faculty or staff members. A second choice would be an English Corner run by students only.

Table 3.6

*English Corner as Evaluated by American Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>Somewhat helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Somewhat helpful</th>
<th>Not helpful at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 shows that nearly half of the respondents thought English Corner would be helpful for American students. No students responded that it would not be helpful at all.

Table 3.7

*The Number of Times Per Week that Students Can go to English Corner*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Every day</th>
<th>Three times a week</th>
<th>Two times a month</th>
<th>Once a month</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tables 3.6 and 3.7 reveal that the respondents thought English Corner would be very helpful to American students. However, not many respondents would go to English Corner every day. The data sets also show that students from 33 different majors participated in the survey, which showed perceptions about English Corner among students from a variety of backgrounds. Most of international students had been in the U.S. less than one year. From the survey, it can be seen that about 30% of international student respondents practiced English with native speakers less than one hour per week. Most of the respondents had not heard of English Corner before.
CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION

From Figure 1, the majority of the international students in the United States were from the Islamic countries, China and Japan. Since Asian students like to spend more time with their friends from their own cultures (Zhao, Kuh and Carini 2005 and Andrade 2006), they need to be motivated to engage in diverse learning activities on campus. Table 3.1 and Figure 3.2 show communication skills to be the strongest factor impeding practice, and lack of motivated opportunities to be the second strongest factor. Table 3.2 and Figure 3.3 reveal that seeking practice opportunities with native speakers was the first choice, and that both attending foreign films and listening to authentic materials were preferred as the second choice for practicing English. From Table 3.3 and Figure 3.4, it can be seen that the preferred places for practicing English would be a place on campus specifically designated for English practice, and that a second choice would be a cafeteria. This result echoes the out-of-classroom learning concept discussed in previous paragraphs.

Tables 3.4 to 3.7 indicate the results of how the respondents perceived English Corner. Most of them would prefer English Corner to be in an open place on campus run by an active team advised by faculty or staff members, and agreed it would be very helpful to American students. This finding proves that the benefits of English Corner meet ESL learners’ needs for English study. Krashen and Terrell’s acquisition and learning (1983) and Krashen’s ideas about anxiety and the silent period in language learning also support the usefulness of English Corner for language learning.

According to Krashen and Terrell’s theory, acquiring a language results from developing language ability by using language in natural situations for communication. While language
learning involves knowing rules and having a conscious knowledge of grammar, acquisition can occur only when people understand messages in the target language. Fluency in a second language is not taught directly and only emerges by itself after a sufficient amount of input. Krashen and Terrell also argued that conscious rules can have a limited function in second language use under three conditions: 1. Time to inspect sentences before they is spoken, 2. Conscious concern about correctness, 3. Knowledge of rules. Learners can improve their writing and speech by applying conscious knowledge of the second language. Normal conversation tends to be quite rapid, and the speakers’ attention is usually on content, not on the format. If beginners overuse their conscious knowledge, they will hesitate to participate in conversation.

Activities aiming at acquisition must be interesting and relevant to the learners, and an environment conducive to acquisition must be created by instructors in order to keep anxiety at a low level. English Corner’s main purpose is for ESL beginners and participants to feel more relaxed; participants are free to choose topics they like and understand, so they do not hesitate to talk. Also, English Corner is an out-of-classroom activity, speaking requires fewer consciously applied grammar rules, so ESL learners have less concern about mistakes. English Corner helps ESL learners to develop their language acquisition skills. Krashen (1985) notes that when second language learners are unmotivated or anxious, the comprehensible input will not reach the internal language processor, (what Chomsky refers to as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD)), because a mental block-the affective filter-prevents them from fully utilizing the comprehensible input they receive for language acquisition. In English Corner, ESL beginners are motivated to interact with other learners and the comprehensible input is able to reach their LAD.
In the Silent Period (Krashen 1985), ESL learners are silent for some time and build up competence by listening to comprehensible input, and with their early language production being limited to some memorized phrases and sentences. When international students come to America, they usually experience the Silent Period. It is hard for them to conduct a normal conversation with native speakers due to their limited English language skills. It is more efficient to provide specially designed language activities for those beginners to practice the early language production at a pre-speech stage (Krashen and Terrell 1983). At a pre-speech stage, beginners are able to answer using single lexical items via their physical response techniques. Since English Corner is specifically designed for ESL learners, especially beginners, to practice English with peers who have the same interests or with the native speakers who are interested in other cultures and want to make friends with international students, ESL learners feel less stressed at English Corner. They gain understanding from their partners even if they only produce short sentences or phrases in the target language.

Tables 3.4-3. show that though more respondents would consider English Corner to be a helpful learning activity, still, about 40% of them would not choose to participate in English Corner at all. The following factors might lead to this result:

• Most respondents had not actually experienced English Corner and were not sure of its benefits of English Corner (in fact, most of them had never heard of English Corner).
• The respondents had never been to English Corner before and were not confident that they would be able to talk in English at English Corner.
• Some respondents were still not aware of what constitute good learning strategies and preferred to stay alone.
• The respondents had not been encouraged to attend English Corner from their teachers or by the University or the campus community.

The first factor was inferred from data. From the data, it appeared that most of the respondents had never heard of English Corner and had had no previous experience with English Corner. The rest of the factors were drawn from my personal education experience in America as an international student. I studied at UNT from 2001 to 2003 and was not always confident of my English. Though I should have to attend activities regularly, I sometimes skipped due to my nervousness about my English. I also had not learned any good language learning strategies during that period and did not realize how important it was to seek practice opportunities with native speakers, no matter how many mistakes I made. I heard that the Intensive English Language Institute at UNT had offered English Corner every week a few years ago, but that not many students had attended, possibly due to lack of motivation. All these factors need to be further investigated in future study, however.

In order to help American universities realize the importance of English Corner, the International Office and the Linguistics Department should host several discussions about English Corner on campus, inviting professors in ESL, faculty in international study, academic advisors working with international students, and some international students of various backgrounds. Then, discussions about English Corner would make it more well-known to the campus. A survey could also be conducted among students with regards to activities, session times, and locations of English Corner. American universities could announce English Corner via flyers, social media, or different student associations; the student leaders from English Corner could also present English Corner in different big events on campus. An American
English Corner may select student mentors from different countries to reach international students for English Corner. These strategies could help promote English Corner on campus.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study proved that English Corner is applicable as an out-of-classroom learning activity on American campuses. Most of the international students and American students alike thought it would be useful to them in either English or cultural learning. Though international students have other means of practicing English and native students can socialize with international students in other settings, English Corner is a great opportunity for students, especially new international students or new native students on campus, to go to a specific place to practice in an environment which causes less anxiety. Horwitz (1986) discussed foreign language anxiety and argued the importance of creating a student support system to offer optimal intervention programs and reduce student anxiety to an extent. Krashen (1980) pointed out that "anxiety contributes to an affective filter which makes the individual student unreceptive to language input; thus, the learner fails to 'take in' the available target language messages, and language acquisition doesn't progress." English Corner as an intervention program tends to create a relaxed atmosphere that avoids causing language anxiety so that learners’ affective filters will not take effect and the comprehensible input can reach LAD.

Student enrollment and retention are significant markers of internationalization. In order to increase international student enrollment and also retain international students, American institutions should pay closer attention to the extent to which native students, administrators, and faculty positively interact and exchange ideas with their international students (Lee, 2010). Effective educational programs and services should be provided to support international students (Zhao etc. 2005). American universities may promote English Corner on campus in different ways so that students would be more motivated to attend English Corner.
A limitation of this study is the source of data. All the data came from one institution. The results of this study might not explain how students perceive English Corner in other American universities. The following further studies are suggested:

- Extend the scope of data in several American universities in order to find out whether English Corner is applicable on many American campuses
- Investigate what stops international students from attending English Corner even though it is considered useful to their English learning
- Investigate the efficacy of English Corner offered in a few American universities

It would be very important to know how many participants attend English Corner each time, and how they believe that English Corner helps them improve their English proficiency.

The findings of those studies would help American universities design a better English Corner on campus.
APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
December 18, 2013

Dr. Sadaf Munshi  
Student Investigator: Jiaying Hu  
Department of Linguistics & Technical Communication  
University of North Texas  
RE: Human Subjects Application No. 13-574

Dear Dr. Munshi:

In accordance with 45 CFR Part 46 Section 46.101, your study titled “English Corner: An Applicable Out of Class Learning Activity for ESL Learners on American Campus” has been determined to qualify for an exemption from further review by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Enclosed are the consent documents with stamped IRB approval. Please copy and use this form only for your study subjects.

No changes may be made to your study’s procedures or forms without prior written approval from the UNT IRB. Please contact Jordan Harmon, Research Compliance Analyst, ext. 4643, if you wish to make any such changes. Any changes to your procedures or forms after 3 years will require completion of a new IRB application.

We wish you success with your study.

Sincerely,

[Signature]  
Patricia L. Kaminski, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

PKijh
University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: English Corner: an applicable out of class learning activity for ESL learners on American campus

Student Investigator: Jiaying Hu, University of North Texas (UNT)
Department of Linguistics & Technical Communication
Supervising Investigator: Sadaf Munshi

Purpose of the Study: International students are often under considerable pressure to succeed academically in American universities. Culture and language issues often discourage international students as ESL learners from practicing English with native students on campus. This study will explore whether an ‘English Corner’ could be an applicable out-of-class learning environment for international students to practice English and socialize with American students with sustainable and autonomous learning efforts. The findings of this study may help the University pay more attention to the importance of the effective out-of-classroom opportunities like ‘English Corner’ for international students and American students and provide better services to increase international student enrollment and retention.

Study Procedures: First students will be asked to sign the Informed Consent form. After that, students will be given ten minutes to complete the study survey with 15 questions.

Foreseeable Risks: There is a potential risk in the loss of confidentiality. This risk will be minimized by having a small research team, safeguarding of data gathered, and anonymity in the final report.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: The findings of this study may help the University pay more attention to the importance of the effective out-of-classroom opportunities like ‘English Corner’ for international students and American students and provide better services to help international students with their English learning, alleviate culture anxiety and encourage more communications between international students and native students so that the University could increase international student enrollment and retention.

Compensation for Participants: There will be no financial remuneration for participation. However subjects could benefit from this survey in English study, culture exchange and socialization.
Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: We are not asking for personal names, but are asking for native language, gender and major. All the completed surveys will be stored in a locked cabinet within the PI's office for a period of three years post-study. Only native language, major and gender will be used in coding. Some information may be stored on PI's computer or flash drives. All personally identifiable data will be destroyed in fall, 2016.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact (Jiaving Hu) at (jiaving.hu@unt.edu) or (Dr. Sadaf Munshi) at (Sadaf.munshi@unt.edu).

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Research Participants' Rights:

Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

- (Jiaving Hu) has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- Your decision whether to participate or to withdraw from the study will have no effect on your grade or standing in this course.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

___________________________
Printed Name of Participant

___________________________  ______________
Signature of Participant  Date

For the Student Investigator or Designee:

Office of Research Services
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011
I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

__________________________________________  _________________________
Signature of Student Investigator                     Date

APPROVED BY THE UNT IRB
DATE: 12-18-73

Office of Research Services
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011

Page 3 of 3
APPENDIX B
ENGLISH CORNER SURVEY
This survey is about the applicability of English Corner in American universities. It will take about a couple of minutes to fill out the survey. American students can skip questions: 9-13

1. What is your native language? _____________

2. Gender: female_______ Male________

3. What university are you currently studying at? ______________

4. Year of Study

   □ IELI (English language Institute)

   □ freshman

   □ Sophomore

   □ Junior

   □ Senior

5. What is your major? _________________

6. Number of years you have been at your current university

   □ Less than one semester

   □ Less than one year

   □ 1-3 years

   □ 4-6 years

   □ 6+years
7. Number of years you have been in the U. S.

☐ Less than one semester

☐ Less than one year

☐ 1-3 years

☐ 4-6 years

☐ 6+ years

8. Please indicate the language(s) of instruction in your country of origin at:

Elementary School_______________________________

Middle School_______________________________

High School_______________________________

College/university ________________________________

9. How long do you practice your English with native speakers out of classroom each week?

☐ Less than one hour

☐ 2-3 hours

☐ 3-4 hours

☐ 4-5 hours

☐ More than 5 hours
10. Please rank the barriers on the degree of affecting your possibility of practicing English with native speakers. (5 very strong, 4 moderately strong, 3 strong, 2 of little strong, 1 not strong)

   Communication Skills________________
   Cultural Differences________________
   Unfamiliar with a new place____________
   My accent________________________
   Lack of motivated opportunities________

11. Listed are English practices in natural settings outside of classroom. Please rank them in order of preference: 1-First Choice, 2-Second Choice, 3-Third Choice, 4-Fourth Choice and 5-Fifth Choice

   Attending foreign language films________
   Seeking native speakers for conversation________________
   Listening to authentic materials in English_________________
   Reading authentic materials in English____________
   Working off campus__________________

12. Below are natural settings for conversations with native speakers. Please rank them in order of preference: 1-First Choice, 2-Second Choice, 3-Third Choice, 4-Fourth Choice and 5-Fifth Choice

   A library________
   A park__________
   A cafeteria_______
A cinema

A place on campus specifically organized for English practice with native speakers

13. How helpful are out of classroom activities on your university campus to your English learning?

☐ Very helpful

☐ somewhat helpful

☐ Helpful

☐ Of little helpful

☐ Not helpful

14. English Corner is a place where English learners come to practice English with each other or native speakers. It is regarded as an out of classroom language practice activity. Have you heard of English Corner before?

☐ Many times

☐ three times

☐ Two times

☐ One time

☐ Never
15. If you’ve been to an English Corner, how well was it organized?

☐ Well organized

☐ somewhat organized

☐ Organized

☐ Of little organized

☐ Not organized

16. Which kind of English Corner do you prefer to go?

☐ English Corner in a park.

☐ English Corner run by students only

☐ English Corner run by nobody

☐ English Corner in a classroom

☐ English Corner in an open place on campus, run by an active team advised by faculty and staff

17. How helpful is English Corner to American students who like to learn other cultures, practice second languages with native speakers or make friends with international students?
☐ Very helpful

☐ somewhat helpful

☐ Helpful

☐ Of little helpful

☐ Not helpful

18. If there is an English Corner on your university campus and the meeting is once a week, how often do you like to go?

☐ Every time

☐ Three times

☐ Two times a month

☐ One time a month

☐ Never
REFERENCES


University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. *English Corners*. Retrieved December 20, 2013, from [http://www.linguistics.illinois.edu/students/esl/ESLopportunities.html](http://www.linguistics.illinois.edu/students/esl/ESLopportunities.html)


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Volunteer awarded for hosting free English corner for 8 years. *Shenzhen Daily, China*. Retrieved December 2, 2012, from [http://www.szdaily.com/content/2012-12/07/content_7475300.htm](http://www.szdaily.com/content/2012-12/07/content_7475300.htm)