

**AN ANALYSIS OF CHINESE EFL LEARNERS' BELIEFS
ABOUT THE ROLE OF ROTE LEARNING
IN VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES**

Xiuping Li

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UNIVERSITY OF SUNDERLAND**School of Education and Lifelong Learning****Declaration**

I declare that, to the best of my knowledge, the information given in this thesis is true and correct and I certify that all the material which is not my own work has been identified.

Signed *deping li*

Date *27/06/09*

*To my dear parents,
for their understanding and support*

ABSTRACT

This study sets out to investigate Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the role of rote learning (RL) in vocabulary learning strategies.

The focus of the study is Chinese EFL learners' culturally-influenced beliefs about their preference for RL strategies as opposed to other memory strategies (MSs).

Based on the literature, there is a widely held belief that Chinese EFL learners rely on RL and that they are passive learners. Although recent studies (e.g. Bond ed. 1996; Kember 1998; Kennedy 2002), have offered reinterpretations of the values concerning RL from Confucian heritage cultures (CHCs), no specific or systematic study appears to have been carried out to focus on RL to discover precisely how and why Chinese learners hold the belief that they rely on RL. What is more lamentable, there is no clear description of the features of RL and almost no consensus in the literature of which memory category RL exactly belongs to.

This study addresses the need for a concrete understanding of the role of RL in EFL vocabulary learning by looking at Chinese EFL learners' own beliefs.

This study has four main aims: (1) to promote a concrete understanding of the concept of RL in the literature; (2) to explore Chinese EFL learners' culturally-based beliefs about their preference for RL strategies; (3) to offer a challenge to widely-held beliefs that Confucian culture is a negative influence on learning; (4) to offer guidance to EFL teachers/researchers who are interested in Chinese EFL learners' memory strategy choice and use.

The data for the study was obtained through three instruments---questionnaires, interviews and an English vocabulary test. The subjects were 100 Chinese learners in the English Department at a large University in the Northeast area of China. To confirm the results of the study and to show their generalisability across China, open-ended questionnaires were also administered to Chinese university teachers from different parts of China as "advanced learners". The data was analysed using descriptive analysis, Condorcet's method, Kendall's *W*, content analysis, chi-square, triangulation and factor analysis. The main hypothesis (Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies are preferable to other memory strategies for learning and memorising vocabulary. They hold positive beliefs about RL, because they consider

RL strategies to be consistent with traditional Chinese culture and values.) are supported by both quantitative and qualitative results.

The findings of the study indicate that Chinese EFL learners generally hold highly positive beliefs about RL in EFL vocabulary learning because they believe that this form of RL---an integration of repetition, memorisation, practice, including reviewing and understanding---suggests consistency with traditional Chinese culture and values. The results also suggest that there is significant difference between the learners who hold positive beliefs and those hold negative beliefs about RL. A factor analysis of the 28 items on their beliefs showed the current situation for Chinese EFL learners, reflecting traditional Chinese learning strategies (Active CHC-based MSs; Repetition with perseverance strategies; Repetition with association strategies; Memorisation through practice strategies; Exam-oriented MSs and Repetition to enhance better use of words strategies), which serve as the features that could characterise Chinese EFL learners. Six factors (Chinese educational/cultural background; EFL environment; traditional habit; national situation/examination demand; Chinese linguistic background/the way of learning mother tongue; and Failure to try out “best” strategies) were identified relating to the reason why RL was so popular and why there continues to be a reliance on RL in China. The responses from teacher questionnaire ascertained the generalisability of the findings.

The findings of the study indicate that Confucian heritage learners’ use of RL actually involves far more complex processes than have been supposed to be the case. Thus, the researcher suggests a new term “Active Confucian-based MSs” to distinguish these strategies from passive RL.

The subjects’ beliefs also suggest that they believe RL is an effective way of learning EFL vocabulary, but not the best way. However, the findings suggest that their belief that RL is consistent with Chinese culture and values tends to override other considerations.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the analysis of Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the role of rote learning (RL) in EFL vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs).

This introduction first gives background information concerning the importance of vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) and RL strategies used by Chinese EFL learners to demonstrate the necessity and importance of conducting the present study.

In the first section, there is also a discussion of confusions regarding definitions of RL and the taxonomy of memory-focused strategies with particular reference to RL.

The second section indicates the aims of this research on Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the role of RL. The third section presents the research questions and the fourth section presents the organisation of the study, identifying the contents of each chapter of the thesis. In section five, the value of the study is explained, to indicate the contribution of the present research to the area of applied linguistics.

1.1 Background to the study

China's "open door policy" toward the West, carried out over two decades, has triggered an explosive interest in English language learning and demand for English studying. As the most populous country in the world, China also boasts one of the largest populations of English learners and a long history of English teaching and learning (Rao 1996:458).

Language learning researchers from both East and West are increasingly interested in Chinese English learners, either because of the influx of more Chinese students into

foreign countries, or because of the growing numbers of English language learners inside China.

When talking about Asian students, Robinson (2000) proposes, “Many will agree they are quiet, diligent, shy, obedient, attentive, and keen to learn and seldom cause problems in class. Do we know and understand their learning styles and problems? What is known about Asian learners?”

A number of studies such as Watkins & Biggs’ (1996) edited collection on “The Chinese Learner: Cultural, Psychological and Contextual Influences”; and the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes Professional Issues Meeting Conference organised by Rossiter (2001) have especially focused on understanding Chinese English learners. There is a widespread belief that Chinese learners are oriented to RL, the definition of which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* is: “the mere act of memorising without proper understanding” (see Section 1.1.1-2 (1) for more information on RL). Such a concept of RL has been explained as a Western Stereotype of Chinese learners (Watkins & Biggs 1996). The use of RL by Chinese EFL learners, as seen from many previous researchers’ perspectives, has been seen as simple repetition or memorisation of vocabulary lists (e.g. Parry & Su’s edited collection 1998) and the Confucian-heritage learning culture has always been discussed as the key source for the choice of using RL by Asian, particularly Chinese learners. This reflects the view that language learning strategies are shaped by learners’ beliefs and that their beliefs are probably shaped by their cultural backgrounds (e.g. Horwitz, 1987, 1999; Wenden, 1987). It is generally accepted that many aspects of EFL learners’ choices of strategies are explained by different cultural beliefs (e.g. Biggs 1999).

Thus, learners' perceptions about learning strategies and the beliefs underlying their strategy choice should be carefully considered. To understand the reason why Chinese EFL learners use RL, it is vital to understand Chinese learners' beliefs about the role of RL in learning. In this study, the importance of studying language learners' beliefs serves as a starting point. Before embarking on the beliefs, however, it is necessary to look at language learning strategies.

1.1.1 General considerations about language learning strategies (LLSs)

Since the 1970s, research into EFL/ESL teaching has moved away from the quest for a perfect teaching method to how successful teachers and learners actually achieve their goals. The role of the learner as an active participant in language learning experience has led to considerable research into the area of language learning strategies (e.g. Cohen 1998; Horwitz 1999; Schmitt 1997).

It should be noted here that the terms "L2 learners", "EFL learners" and "FL learners" are used interchangeably in this study in the sense that all of the terms indicate those who are learning English as a non-native, additional language (Nakamura 2000:6).

Foreign language (FL) or second language (SL) learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, or more transferable to new situations (Oxford 1990:8). In the process of identifying and improving language learning strategies, many studies deal with vocabulary learning because of the growing awareness of the importance of vocabulary. Research into the specific area of memory strategies (MSs) in vocabulary learning has also been mainly conducted with emphasis on the

storage and retrieval process. Language learning strategies are considered as special ways of processing information that enhance comprehension, learning, or retention of the information (e.g. O'Malley & Chamot 1990:1). The benefit of MSs relating to VLSs has been increasingly recognised (e.g. Oxford 1990; Schmitt 1997). Cohen (1998:5), linking the notion of consciousness to the definition of strategies, states that *language Learning Strategies* include strategies for identifying the material that needs to be learned, distinguishing it from other material if need be, grouping it for easier learning (e.g. grouping vocabulary by category into nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and so forth), having repeated contact with the material (e.g. through classroom tasks or the completion of homework assignments), and formally committing the material to memory when it does not seem to be acquired naturally (whether through rote memory techniques such as repetition, the use of mnemonics, or some other memory technique).

1.1.1-1 Importance of vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs)

Few language learners will disagree with the importance of vocabulary. Horwitz (1999), using her "Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)", found that with respect to vocabulary learning, all groups of EFL students agreed that the important part of learning a language was learning vocabulary (agreement ranging from 42 to 79% of the subjects)... The following excerpts are selected from some widely recognised studies:

Wilkins (1972:111) emphasised "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary *nothing* can be conveyed".

Cook's (1991:37) conclusion is consistent with Wilkins in that "Grammar provides the overall patterns, vocabulary the material to put in the patterns".

One can not speak, understand, read or write a foreign language without knowing a lot of words. Vocabulary learning is at the heart of mastering a foreign language (Rubin & Thompson 1994:79).

Vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learner (Coady & Huckin 1997:5).

Many researchers claim that vocabulary is an essential part of language learning. Although for many years it was a neglected area of serious linguistic research (Meara 1980). Since the 1980s, the field of vocabulary studies has no longer languished as the neglected "Cinderella" of applied linguistics. The importance of vocabulary in the ESL/EFL learning process has been widely recognised and well-established, and a number of specific strategies for learning vocabulary have been identified by many researchers (Ahmed 1998; Nakamura 2000; Oxford 1990; Schmitt 1997). The mushrooming amount of experimental studies and pedagogical and reference material (For example, according to Ellis 1995:553-554, a study by Cohen & Apeh 1981 suggests that the use of mnemonic association aids vocabulary learning; and a study by Brown & Perry 1991 provides three VLSs—keyword, semantic, and keyword-semantic) indicates that language learners are increasingly aware of the importance and rapid development of VLSs.

Much of the research indicates that enlarging language vocabulary has been one of the objectives of many EFL learners and there are different ways to achieve this objective. VLSs are flowering: mechanical/rote learning strategies (these two terms are used interchangeably in this study), grouping strategies, keyword strategies, bilingual dictionary strategies, etc. Different learners adopt different strategies that

work for them. For example, some learners focus their attention on learning words in lists or completing various vocabulary exercises. Perhaps it seems time-and-effort-consuming to some other learners. Many studies on learning strategies encourage the learners to use all means available to them as they work to learn English vocabulary. Schmitt's (1997) study on vocabulary strategy survey showed five vocabulary learning strategy groups: Determination (DET), Social (SOC), Memory (MEM), Cognitive (COG), and Metacognitive (MET). The identification of those strategy groups suggests strategies for the discovery of new word's meaning and for consolidating a word once it has been encountered. Schmitt (1997:207-208) lists in his "A taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies":

DET strategies are used to analyse part of speech; analyse affixes and roots; check for L1 cognate; analyse any available pictures or gestures; guess from textual context; find a word's meaning through bilingual dictionaries and monolingual dictionaries; master large number of words by using word lists and flash cards.

SOC strategies include: asking teacher for an L1 translation; asking teacher for paraphrase or synonym of new word; asking teacher for a sentence including the new word; asking classmates for meaning; discovering new meaning through group work activity; studying and practising meaning in a group; teacher's checking students' flash cards or word lists for its meaning, or interacting with native speakers.

MEM strategies consist of studying word with pictorial representation of its meaning; imaging word's meaning; connecting word to a personal experience; associating the word with its coordinates; connecting the word to its synonyms and antonyms; using semantic maps; using "scales" for gradable adjectives; using peg method; using loci method; grouping words together to study them; grouping words together spatially on a page; using new word in sentences; grouping words together

within a storyline; studying the spelling of a word; studying the sound of a word; saying new word aloud when studying; imaging word form; underlining initial letters of the word; configuration; using keyword method; remembering affixes and roots; remembering part of speech; paraphrasing the word's meaning; using cognates in study; learning the words of an idiom together; using physical action when learning a word; using semantic feature grids.

COG strategies refer to verbal repetition; written repetition; word lists; flash cards; taking notes in class; using the vocabulary section in students' textbook; listening to tape of word lists; putting English labels on physical objects; keeping a vocabulary notebook.

MET strategies include: using English-language media (songs, movies, newspapers, etc.); testing oneself with word tests; using spaced word practice; skipping or passing new word; Continuing to study word over time.

In looking at VLSs, it is natural for language learners to focus on MSs. Due to the essential nature of their role in vocabulary learning, and their contribution to the storage and retrieval of vocabulary, the importance of MSs should not be ignored.

1.1.1-2 Importance of memory strategies (MSs)

Thompson (1987:43) points out that, "It is difficult to think of any educational goal for which the ability to retain information is unimportant. Human memory is crucial to the concept of learning".

What is a memory strategy then?

The following comments suggest the definition and its importance:

“Memory strategies, sometimes called mnemonics, have been used for thousands of years” (Oxford 1990:38).

“Most memory strategies (traditionally known as mnemonics) involve relating the word to be retained with some previously learned knowledge, using some form of imagery, or grouping” (Schmitt 1997:211).

“...mnemonics work by utilizing some well-known principles of psychology: a retrieval plan is developed during encoding, and mental imagery, both visual and verbal, is used. They help individuals to learn faster and recall better because they aid integration of new material into existing cognitive units and because they provide retrieval cues” (Thompson 1987:43).

“Mnemonics was not considered to be just skill of simple memorisation, but rather a true, rigorous art which required imagination, effort, and good mind” (Gray 1997:1).

The above comments imply that the term “memory strategies” does not mean exactly the same as the term “Mnemonics” though *sometimes* called so. “Mnemonic” means “aiding memory” (Higbee 1979) and it seems one of many MSs. Further literature research shows that rote learning (RL) may also be one of the MSs, seeing that it can aid memory as well.

1.1.1-2 (1) Definition of Rote learning (RL)

Rote: (*usually disapproving*) memory or habit, rather than understanding. To **learn** something **by rote**, or **rote learning** means learning something in order to be able to repeat it from memory rather than learning it in order to understand it (*Cambridge International Dictionary of English* 1995:1235).

Rote learning is memorisation (Cohen & Feigenbaum 1982, quoted from Smith 1998:1).

Rote learning is learning in "a mechanical way without thought of meaning" (Macquarie Dictionary quoted from Biggs 1997:1).

Rote learning is a method involving repetition and memorisation (Moore 2000:1).

From the above definitions or descriptions, a RL system does not involve any processes which enable the learner to understand or interpret the information learnt. The only thing such systems do is memorise or store the incoming information for later use. RL is basically a simple and passive process. However, it does illustrate some issues that are relevant to more complex learning issues.

Gairns & Redman (1986:93) point out that RL is a memorisation technique which has a long history in language learning:

This involves repetition of target language items either silently or aloud and may involve writing down the items (more than once). These items commonly appear in list form; typical examples being items and their translation equivalent, items and their definitions (e.g. nap=short sleep), paired items (e.g. hot-cold, tall-short), and irregular verbs. A common practice is for the learner to use one side of the list as prompts and cover the other side in order to test himself.

These definitions, then, focus on repetition, practice and memorisation. They all refer to the strategies which contribute to storage and retrieval of new knowledge, and storage and retrieval of new knowledge are the two key functions of memory strategies (Oxford, 1990:58). Therefore, RL can be regarded as one of the MSs which cover repetition, practice and memorisation.

1.1.1-2 (2) Rote Learning as repetition, practice and memorisation

The following statements made by researchers can be used to support the above argument:

Repetition: Oxford (1990:45) categorised repetition into cognitive groups, (*but into “memory group” in other studies, italics mine*), defining it as saying or doing something over and over: listening to something several times; rehearsing; imitating a native speaker. Wenden’s (1991:21) identification is similar to Oxford’s: imitating a language model, including overt practice and silent rehearsal.

Practice refers to strategies which contribute to the storage and retrieval of language while focusing on *accuracy of usage*. Practice involves strategies such as: repetition, rehearsal, experimentation, application of rules, imitation, and attention to detail.

Memorisation also refers to strategies which focus on the storage and retrieval of language; therefore some of the strategies, such as drill and repetition, used for practice are the same as memorisation strategies. However, in the case of memorisation, attention is paid to *the storage and retrieval process*. The goal of these strategies is organisation... (Wenden & Rubin 1987:24).

It has been found in general language learning strategies research that repetition is a type of strategy most frequently used by L2/FL learners (O’Malley et al 1985; Chamot 1987). It has also been suggested in language learning strategies literature that memorisation involving repetition contributes to the storage and retrieval of language, and there has been a particular emphasis on the storage and retrieval process (Rubin 1987:24). It is often the case in VLS research that, the terms memorisation and repetition are interchangeably used, in that both terms relate to RL

strategies which consolidate meaning or commit to memory, the form and meaning of the L2/FL item.

Unfortunately, repetition has long been considered to be out of fashion in language education (Ellis & Beaton 1993a; 1993b). The reason for this might be that repetition is regarded as a typical form of rote memorisation, which has been seen as inferior to the supposedly more effective way of L2/FL often referred to as the mnemonic keyword method (Nakamura 2000:43).

It is clear that RL involves repetition, practice and memorisation, but arriving at a commonly accepted definition of RL is fraught with difficulties. The distinction between memorisation and learning is often less clear-cut for Chinese than for Western students. The Chinese tend to see memorisation as a part, though not the whole, of the process of learning (Gu & Johnson 1996:670). What is more, repetition/*recitation* and practice are interchangeable terms for many Chinese learners. For instance, in English translations of the first line of the *Analects*, “repetition” and “practice” are often used interchangeably. (e.g. “study and practise often” in Louie 1986:84; De Bary & Bloom 1999:45, but “to learn and at due times to repeat...” in Gardner 1990:99).

According to Biggs (1999:2), the Chinese have a saying:

“Repetition is the route to understanding”.

Due to the different understanding of the concept of RL, there appear to be Western stereotypes or misconceptions of Chinese learners with Confucian heritage cultures (CHCs). In Western learners’ view, Chinese learners’ learning seems to be oriented to rote memorisation. That is: “the mere act of memorising without proper

understanding” as the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it. However, Chinese learners go over something many, many times so that they will understand it better. Therefore, Chinese learners often combine the processes of memorisation and understanding (Kember 1998; Kennedy 2002). In other words, for Chinese learners, memorising and understanding may occur together (e.g. Kember & Gow 1991). They also believe that practice involves reviewing and reviewing is a part of learning (Louie 1986). Recent research has suggested that the basic difference lies in how learners interpret RL, and that difference in interpretation leads to differences in how they handle RL strategies. This has given rise to an argument that Chinese learners’ interpretation of RL is closely linked to the nature of Chinese culture and traditional beliefs about the use of RL.

As indicated above, the existence of opposing views on Chinese EFL learners’ use of RL grows out of cross-cultural differences in belief. The concept of RL seems hazy, but clarity will increase with further research, revealing that Chinese culture of Confucian heritage underlines a specific concept of RL.

Some recent studies have been carried out to identify the features of learners with CHCs with the intention of demythologising the teaching of international students. Some studies have found that RL can be appropriate part of a deep approach to learning. For example, Hong Kong students learned meaningfully, then memorised the result to cope with examination requirements (Tang 1991). Biggs (1998:726) emphasises the difference between *rote* learning and *repetitive* learning, for which the further explanation is that *rote* learning is “the mere exercise of memory without proper understanding” (*Shorter Oxford Dictionary*) and *repetitive* learning uses repetition as a means of ensuring accurate recall. Biggs believes that the choice to use repetitive learning strategically certainly appears to be more common in CHCs.

According to Biggs (1997:2) “Understanding complexity requires repetition, in any culture, but in the West we tend to forget that. We perceive repetitive learning as mindless rote learning”.

1.1.1-2 (3) Differences between CHCs and Western understandings of “RL”

The appearance of significantly increased studies of Asian students with CHCs, with particular reference to Chinese learners in EFL learning strategies becomes a universal phenomenon. It suggests a universally acknowledged Eastern/Western distinction in language learning strategies. As discussed above, a general belief about Chinese or even Asian learners in literature is that these learners use more RL or memorisation strategies which are taken as simple and passive. However, other studies suggest that for the learners with CHCs, RL is the combination of memorising and understanding. Without question in this study, thought has to be given to differences between CHCs and Western understandings of what RL *actually* is. It is worth making a distinction although it is difficult to find out the differences between culture-specific and more universal learning dispositions towards RL. A comparative study between nationalities in the future may be a way to find out this distinction. What is important for this study is to explain the definition of RL through looking at explicit cultural beliefs. In this study, the literature research traced the origin of RL of Chinese learners back to the traditional CHCs beliefs about learning methods (see Chapter 2, for detailed information). It suggests that Chinese EFL learners favour RL, generally because they believe that their use of RL is a combination of repetition, memorisation, practice including reviewing which are leading to deep understanding rather than simple

repetition/memorisation which are shallow and ineffective. For this reason, the following working definition of RL is proposed: RL is a learning strategy which involves repetition, memorisation, understanding, practice and reviewing lexical items.

Following Gairns & Redman (1986:93), RL is a memorisation technique involving repetition. Key features of their “RL” have been summarised in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Features of RL strategies involving repetition

Rote learning strategies
1. To read silently or aloud
2. To write down the items (more than once)
3. To learn in list forms or cards (can be taken anywhere and studied at any free moment)
4. To use typical examples
5. To find translation equivalents
6. To find definitions
7. To group paired items
8. To memorise irregular verbs

Source: Adapted from Gairns & Redman’s (1986:93) statements.

However, based on the literature review, the concept of RL with CHCs reveals a combination or an integration of repetition, memorisation, understanding and practice including reviewing as discussed above. The features of which will be illustrated in Figure 1.1. in taxonomy of MSs.

As indicated above, a classification for MSs in the present study, including the features of RL, should first of all be set out, as its role in this study is considerable.

Next the research will present the taxonomy of MSs and the place of RL within it.

1.1.1-2 (4) Taxonomy of memory strategies (MSs)

Current disagreements over how VLSs should be classified, categorised with significant differences in definitions of RL, present particular problems for this study.

In the study of VLSs, there does not seem to be a consensus among researchers as to which strategies belong to which class (Daly 1997:19). MSs face the same problem.

If there is a limited literature on the specific features of RL strategies, what is more lamentable is that there is almost no consensus in the literature as to which category RL exactly belongs.

Confusion exists in the research literature as to what strategies should be subsumed under which category headings. For example, repetition is subsumed under the category of memorisation in Rubin's (1981), Grains & Redman's (1986), Purpura's (1994) typology, but classified as a cognitive strategy by O'Malley (1985) et al, Oxford (1990), and Schmitt (1997). The concept of RL or the guidelines for determining the four categories of MSs in the present study were developed by adapting the taxonomy from prior research in this area. One reason why this study for this is precisely because of the lack of a clear taxonomy and the currently fluid categories and open debate in relation to categorisation.

Notwithstanding the continuing debate, the taxonomy proposed by Oxford (1990) has been widely accepted. According to Schmitt (1997:205), "Of the more established systems, the one developed by Oxford (1990) seemed best able to capture and organize the wide variety of vocabulary learning strategies identified". The figures in Oxford's study (1990:17-21) indicate 2 classes (direct & indirect strategies) which break down into 6 groups (*memory*, *cognitive* and *compensation* for

direct strategies, and *metacognitive*, *affective* and *social* for indirect strategies.

Oxford's (1990) memory strategies fall into four sets:

1) **creating mental linkages:** this is subdivided into three strategies: a) grouping---classifying or reclassifying language material into meaningful units. e.g. all nouns or verbs, or topics, such as words about the weather; b) associating/elaborating---relating new language information to concepts already in memory. e.g. school-book-paper-tree-country-earth; and c) placing new words into a context---a word or phrase in a meaningful sentence, conversation or story in order to remember it.

2) **applying images and sounds:** four strategies are included here: a) using imagery---relating new language information to concepts in memory by means of meaningful visual imagery, either in the mind or in an actual drawing; b) semantic mapping---making an arrangement of words into a picture or diagram, which has a key concept at the centre or at the top, and related words and concepts linked with the key concept by means of a line or arrows; c) using keywords---remembering a new word by using auditory and visual links. The first step is to identify a familiar word in one's own language that sounds like the new word---this is the "auditory link." The second step is to generate an image of some relationship between the new word and a familiar one--this is the "visual link." d) Representing sounds in memory---remembering new language information according to its sound. This involves linking the new word with familiar words or sounds from any language: the new language, one's own language, or any other.

3) **reviewing well:** reviewing in carefully spaced intervals. e.g. a review 10 minutes after the initial learning, then 20 minutes later, an hour or two later, and so on in order to remember the new target language information.

4) **employing actions:** there are two strategies in this set: a) using physical response or sensation ---physically acting out a new expression, e.g. going to the door, and b) using mechanical techniques---using creative but tangible techniques, e.g. writing words on cards, with the new word written on one side and the definition on the other.

Although, unfortunately, repetition is subsumed under the category of cognitive strategies rather than memory strategies in Oxford's study, the classification in categorising vocabulary-specific strategies in memory aspect is still believed to be generally suitable to the categories in the present study. The reason for that is just because in the case of vocabulary, the goal of both Memory Strategies and Cognitive Strategies in Oxford's study is to assist recall of words through some form of language manipulation (Schmitt 1997). Because of the currently fluid categories, some other criteria must be allowed to evoke for a significant contribution to the present study. The headings of the memory categories in this study are organised, borrowed or mainly based on Oxford's (1990) four memory strategies and the features of RL concerning repetition were adapted from Gairns & Redman's (1986:93) statements and the definition of RL with CHCs was based on literature research.

The strategy in Oxford's study in terms of using mechanical techniques under the subheading of employing action, seems closer to RL. Therefore, in the present study, RL is placed here and the order of the four MSs are rearranged with RL as the first one in order to stress its significance.

To illustrate this classification more clearly, the diagram as Figure 1.1 is presented below:

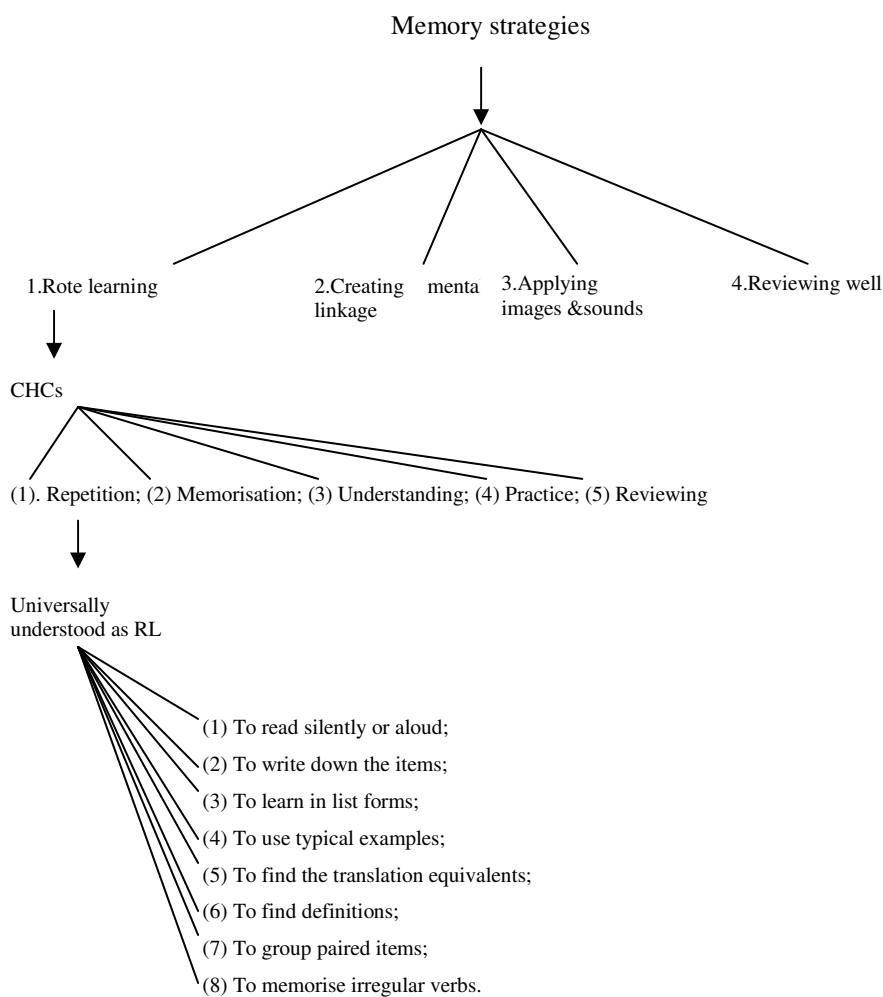


Figure 1.1 Diagram of RL in relation to memory strategies as applied in the present study

As Figure 1.1 shows, RL fits into the framework of the four large categories of memory strategies, on which the data analysis in this study is based.

As to the operational terms used throughout this study, they will be provided in the glossary (see Appendix 5). The classification and definition for MSs in this study will be provided below.

1.1.1-3 Classification & definition for the purpose of data analysis of memory strategies

The classification of MSs for this study was presented in 1.1.1-2(4) in Taxonomy consideration, and how RL fitted into the framework of the MSs was also illustrated in Figure 1.1. As discussed in 1.1.1-2(4), the categories of MSs in this study were adapted from Oxford's (1990:39) classification and the features of RL strategies involving repetition were adapted from Gairns & Redman's (1986:93) statements. The four categories of MSs are---(1) Rote learning; (2) Creating mental linkages; (3) Applying images and sounds and (4) Structured reviewing.

This classification was used for two main purposes: a) in structuring the questionnaire and b) in analysing the data of Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about MSs in particular reference to RL in China.

This focus on the particular settings in which Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about RL in China were investigated links well with previous research, such as Horwitz's (1987) focus on the specific beliefs held by particular culture groups, and Wenden's (1987) investigation of whether students' beliefs about language learning can influence their language learning strategies. However, the beliefs elicited by Horwitz's (1987) instrument, *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI) (for further information, see 2.1.1) did not seem to have addressed some of the specific beliefs held by particular cultural groups. The five major areas to assess student beliefs (1. foreign language aptitude, 2. the difficulty of language learning, 3. the nature of language learning 4. learning and communication strategies, and 5. motivations) in the BALLI were not the central concern in this study which tended to identify Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the role of RL in vocabulary learning. All the items in BALLI seem favourable for assessing student opinions on a variety

of issues and controversies related to language learning, which are of more benefit to improving teaching SL/FL strategies than assisting in investigating of learners' specific beliefs about vocabulary learning. The researcher could not find any items in direct relation to the beliefs about MSs or RL strategies in Chinese settings. Hence, BALLI was not pursued in the design of instruments for the present study, although BALLI was largely accepted as the tool to elicit commonly held beliefs.

Definitions of the main strategies used within each category are provided in the table below (see Table 1.2).

It should be noted that the term "FL/L2 vocabulary items" is used in this study to include fixed and idiomatic phrases as well as single words.

Table 1.2 Working definitions of main memory strategies in vocabulary learning

Categories and strategies	Description
Rote learning	
*Within Confucian heritage cultures (CHCs)	
1. To repeat	<i>Reading, speaking or writing what is learnt in the course again and again.</i>
2. To memorise	<i>Committing any useful vocabulary to memory.</i>
3. To understand	<i>Giving priority to understanding when learning anything.</i>
4. To practise	<i>Doing varieties of exercises repeatedly to strengthen memory.</i>
5. To review	<i>Going over old materials many times for a solid basis to learn new.</i>
*Within universal concept	
1. To read silently or aloud	<i>Learning words through reading aloud or silently many, many times.</i>
2. To write down the items	<i>Writing down the vocabulary items again & again.</i>
3. To learn in list/card forms	<i>Learning vocabulary items on lists/cards many, many times.</i>

4. To use typical examples *Using fixed or idiomatic expressions repeatedly.*
5. To find translation equivalents *Converting an English language expression into the Chinese language or vice versa.*
6. To find definitions *Getting the meaning of a word through a dictionary or teacher.*
7. To group paired items *Saying or writing synonyms or antonyms as pairs again and again.*
8. To memorise irregular verbs *Saying or writing irregular verbs many, many times.*

Creating mental linkages

9. To group *Classifying or reclassifying language material into meaningful units.*
10. To associate/elaborate *Relating new language information to concepts already in memory.*
11. To place new words into a context *Placing a word or phrase in a meaningful sentence, conversation or story in order to remember it.*

Applying images and sounds

12. To use imagery *Relating new language information to concepts in memory by means of meaningful visual imagery, either in the mind or in an actual drawing.*
13. To use semantic mapping *Making arrangement of words into a diagram, which has a key concept at the centre or at the top, and related words and concepts linked to the key concept by means of a line or arrows.*
14. To use keywords *Remembering a new word by using auditory and visual links. The first step is to identify a familiar word in one's own language that sounds like the new word--this is the "auditory link." The second step is to generate an image of some relationship between the new word and a familiar one--this is the "visual link."*
15. To represent sounds in memory *Remembering new language information according to its sound. This involves linking the new word with familiar words or sounds from any language: the new language, one's own language, or any other.*

Reviewing well

16. To do structured reviewing *Reviewing in carefully spaced intervals, gradually increasing the length of time between reviews.*

Descriptions are adapted from Gairns & Redman (1986:93) and Oxford (1990:40-43), (italics mine).

* =Different interpretations for RL.

The above discussion shows that quite a lot of strategies are available for FL learners. However, how and why different strategies are selected by language learners should be a serious consideration.

The following factors, synthesized by Oxford (1990) from the existing language learning strategy research, have been generally accepted as a set of factors influencing the choice of strategies used among EFL learners. It should be noted here that Oxford does not just refer to MSs, but general language learning strategies. For the convenience of discussion, those factors listed by Oxford (1994) are numbered as follows:

1.1.1-4 Oxford's eight factors influencing the choice of language learning strategies

- 1) "Motivation." More motivated students tended to use more strategies than less motivated students, and the particular reason for studying the language (motivational orientation, especially as related to career field) was important in the choice of strategies.
- 2) "Gender." Females were reported to use a wider range of strategies than males in many studies (although sometimes males surpassed females in the use of a particular strategy).
- 3) "Cultural background." Rote memorisation and other forms of memorisation were more prevalent among some Asian students than among students from other cultural backgrounds. Certain other cultures also appeared to encourage this strategy among learners.
- 4) "Attitudes and beliefs." These were reported to have a profound effect on the strategies learners choose, with negative attitudes and beliefs often causing poor strategy use or lack of orchestration of strategies.
- 5) "Type of task." The nature of the task helped determine the strategies naturally employed to carry out the task.

- 6) “Age and L2 stage.” Students of different ages and stages of L2 learning used different strategies, with certain strategies often being employed by older or more advanced students.
- 7) “Learning style.” Learning style (general approach to language learning) often determined the choice of L2 learning strategies.
- 8) “Tolerance of ambiguity.” Students who were more tolerant of ambiguity used significantly different learning strategies in some instances than did students who were less tolerant of ambiguity.

Of particular consequence in connection with the present study should be the third and the fourth points. Due to the world-wide belief about the feature of using RL among Asian learners, with particular reference to Chinese EFL learners, and the influence of their beliefs on the strategy choice, which forms the central theme of this study, the importance of studying learners’ beliefs will be discussed next.

1.1.2 Importance of studying learners’ beliefs

First, what is involved in studying beliefs? In order to answer the question, it is necessary to ask what is meant by belief.

1.1.2-1 Definitions of belief

What are *beliefs* about language learning? There is no complete consensus on meaning, although the definition of this concept enjoys popularity in language learning research. Below are some of the definitions of belief about language and language learning:

- notions about language learning that students have acquired (Kuntz 1996:4);
- an individual's opinions about language learning (Banya and Cheng 1997);
- synonymous with attitudes, representations, opinions or ideologies (Fraser and Gaskell 1990);
- general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning and about the nature of language learning and teaching (Victori and Lockhart 1995:224).
- central constructs in every discipline which deals with human behaviour and learning (Sakui & Gaies 1999:474);
- subjective understandings which are relatively stable and idiosyncratic (Gaies 1998 quoted from Asbjornson 1999).

Asbjornson (1999:1) explains Gaies' (1998) proposition as follows:

First, beliefs are subjective, therefore, they do not necessarily reflect external reality. Beliefs reflect "truths" held by individuals and, therefore, are potentially facilitative for language learning (e.g., everyone can learn a language) or debilitating (e.g., boys are not good language learners). Second, beliefs about language learning should be stable over time, which indicates that beliefs are formed and maintained by a complex social and cultural system. Finally, Gaies asserts that belief systems are unique to individuals.

Borg (2001:186), focused on some common features of definitions of beliefs (the truth element; the relationship between beliefs and behaviour; conscious versus unconscious beliefs; beliefs as value commitments), and summed these up as follows:

A *belief* is a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour.

Although the definitions of *beliefs* are not consistent, defined, those listed above clearly show what is involved in studying beliefs about language learning and indicate the importance of studying learners' beliefs are well defined. As Williams & Burden (1997:56) conclude, "Beliefs are notoriously difficult to define and evaluate, but there do appear to be a number of helpful statements that we can make about them. They tend to be culturally bound, to be formed early in life and to be resistant to change". This study gives a focus specifically on culturally-influenced beliefs, as traditional Chinese culture is so well-entrenched that Chinese EFL learners' beliefs are likely to influence their learning strategies. Research studies on the relationship between beliefs and language learning strategies have suggested that beliefs would be likely to be an underlying factor in the use of strategies. The studies on the relationship between beliefs and strategy choices involving cultural influence, have burgeoned and culminated in two major works in this field: Horwitz (1987), who established "Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)", and Wenden (1987), who used a rather different technique which she describes as "content analysis" to identify, define and categorise the participants' statements from the interviews.

Horwitz's (1987) research conclusion that some beliefs are probably shaped by students' previous experiences as language learners, and other beliefs are probably shaped by students' cultural background, have been widely accepted and supported by many other language learning researchers. For instance, according to

Nachiengmai (1998), Turner's (1994) study of two students with different cultural background reflects Horwitz's idea. Turner believes that the relatively poorer result of the Chinese student who did not achieve the standard of written work that the student from a non-Chinese cultural background achieved, reveals his beliefs from his own Chinese cultural background that correction is very important and that the teacher is the only authority in the classroom to whom learners can give respect. Thus, the cultural background is an important factor in forming learners' beliefs. The relationship between culture and beliefs will be examined in the next section.

1.1.3 The relationship between culture and beliefs

1.1.3-1 Definitions of culture

First, what is meant by culture? According to Lewis' statement (1999:213), taken from the long list of definitions in *Collins English Dictionary*, culture should be defined as:

the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge, which constitute the shared bases of social action;

the total range of activities and ideas of a group of people with shared traditions...

Similarly, Fan (2000:3-4) states that culture can be described as:

the collection of values, beliefs, behaviours, customs, and attitudes that distinguish a society.

Culture can be studied at different levels:

- international (e.g. East v West)
- national culture (e.g. Chinese culture)
- regional culture, subculture
- business culture (industry or professional culture)
- organisational (corporate) culture.

A national culture is best embodied in the values its people hold (Fan 2000:4). Cultural values shape learners' beliefs and attitudes and guide their behaviour. Thus understanding the cultural background is an essential first step in understanding learners' beliefs about language learning strategies.

There have been numerous studies describing the language learning beliefs of different cultural groups---Horwitz's several studies (1987; 1988; 1999) looking at the beliefs of American students of many cultural backgrounds; Kuntz' (1996) examination of Yemeni students; Littlewood *et al's* (1996) Hong Kong students; Sakui & Gaies' Japanese students (1999); Wenden's (1987) 25 adult ESL learners of various cultural backgrounds in the United States and Yang's (1993) Taiwanese students. Each study looks at the influence of language learners' beliefs on strategy choice through their different cultural backgrounds. However, research on the beliefs and perceptions underlying choice of learning strategies is mostly limited to identification of those beliefs (Wenden 1987:103). Further, the research is also limited in identifying similarities and differences across cultural groups. (e.g. the percentage of agreement or disagreement on a questionnaire item between Asian learners and American EFL ones). The connection of specific beliefs to specific learning strategies based on cultural backgrounds has not yet been discussed in

detail. How the beliefs were formed, developed and operated in relation to the culture of a particular language group requires extensive research. As discussed above, previous studies of EFL learners' beliefs about language learning strategies indicate that the importance of getting to know the specific country and its culture, and understanding its learners' expectations and commitment to the field research, can not be over-emphasised. As to the widely-held beliefs about RL as the cultural preference of Asian learners, with particular reference to Chinese EFL learners, in many studies only a few sentences have been devoted to the discussion, which produces a controversial response, either positive or negative (reviewed later in this chapter).

To better understand Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about their use of RL strategies in vocabulary, the concept of Chinese culture should be explored.

1.1.3-2 Chinese culture

Chinese culture gives the Chinese people their basic identity. Over the course of its five thousand years of history, China has created a special culture. The Chinese people have shared a common culture and history longer than any other group on earth. A 4,000 year old writing system has enabled the Chinese people, who speak a wide variety of dialects, to communicate with each other and maintain a common cultural identity.

Confucianism is the overriding cultural influence in Chinese society. The philosophy first espoused by Confucius (551-479 BC), some 25 centuries ago, still unites the Chinese people today. Confucianism is a major system of thought in China, developed from the teachings of Confucius and his disciples, and concerned with the principles of good conduct, practical wisdom and proper social relationships.

Confucianism has influenced the Chinese attitude towards life, set the patterns of living and standards of social value, and provided the background for Chinese political theories and institutions. It has spread from China to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam and has aroused interest among Western scholars.

It is important to acknowledge that the culture of China, including the Confucian tradition and subsequent developments is quite unique and special. However, whether Confucian influence on Chinese culture is a positive thing or a negative one can not be answered with a simple yes or no. How Confucian education has been linked to the use of RL as a main strategy for Chinese learners is another question with no simple answer. In brief, this tradition is dynamic and complex. More detailed information concerning Confucian education will be reviewed in Chapter Two.

Many researchers argue, in a negative way, that the teacher-centred classroom or teachers' authority and the students' passive role, leading to RL in China, stem from Confucian-based education, and that this in turn has led to the heavy emphasis on accuracy in the national examination (e.g. Insull 2001; Parry & Su 1998).

However, some researchers have posed question: "How can Chinese learners be so successful academically (often out-performing their Western peers) when their teaching/learning methods seem so oriented to rote memorisation?" (e.g. Watkins & Biggs 1996).

With the increasing number of experimental studies on the use of language learning strategies of different cultural origins, the different understandings of what RL means to Chinese EFL learners and the use of RL are increasingly noticed, although relatively little research is devoted to it. Different views on Chinese learners' RL will be discussed next.

1.1.4 Beliefs about Chinese EFL learners and RL

There are some studies such as Chang (1993) and Rao (1996) relating to Chinese culturally-influenced ways of EFL learning and focusing on teachers' authority and students' passive role. However, there is not a generally accepted opinion of Chinese learners and the way they learn. There are a range of negative beliefs and positive beliefs from both Western and Eastern researchers. As indicated earlier, RL is deeply-rooted in Chinese tradition and remains the predominant method for education and training across the rapidly developed economies of China (Martinsons & Martinsons 1996). It should be noted here that in this study the terms "Chinese EFL learners" and "Chinese learners" have to be used interchangeably when referring to the well-held beliefs about the features of Chinese learners of any subjects, including EFL learning, because RL strategy use and choice are held to be characteristic of all Chinese learners.

RL is believed world-wide to be Chinese learners' cultural preference, which tends to portray Chinese learners as surface or passive learners. Typically in the Western literature, Chinese learners are regarded as "tape recorders" (Biggs 1996:47), and RL is regarded as a source of hindrance to widely-used communicative strategies. Out of respect, Chinese learners are usually not as ready to argue or to voice opinions in class as European students (e.g. Chen 1990; Lucas 2000), and these factors have led some researchers to argue that Confucian-based culture constitutes a formidable obstacle in the way of learning. The influence of the imperial examination system, *keju*, in ancient China is blamed as the root cause of today's examination-driven educational system (Crozier 2002; Parry & Su 1998; Ze 1995). It is noting here that some of the criticisms come from *Chinese*, rather than Western, research. Memory

strategies adopted to deal with the exams are termed examination-oriented memory strategies (Sheorey 1999) and the RL system is criticized as a feature of an examination culture (Cheung, 2000).

Some Eastern researchers (e.g. Cheung 2000; Gu & Johnson 1996) offer the same opinion, for example, some employers in Hong Kong frequently lament the SAR's (Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China) education system, complaining that it produces a labour pool with poor problem-solving skills and limited initiative. Hong Kong's rote-learning system is suggested as one reason why employers are looking for staff abroad. Students trained to regurgitate facts often lack the thinking patterns to apply this knowledge to real-world problems. Cheung (2000) laments that "reading, writing, and rote learning...drive students to Western Schools".

Although it seems that more negative evidence than positive evidence about RL is provided in the literature, some researchers have considered RL from a positive point of view. Written and verbal repetition, repeatedly writing or saying a word over and over again, are common strategies in many parts of the world. They are so entrenched that students often resist giving them up to try other ones (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

However, the role of RL as an effective stimulus has so far been identified only in the initial stage of learning, which leads students to reach high levels of proficiency (e.g. Gairns & Redman 1986; Carter 1987; McCarthy 1990; Thompson 1987) and leads to easily gained marks and the likelihood of good marks in the exams. Too little attention has been paid to the issue of whether it is effective in all the stages of VLSs.

Interestingly and significantly, some recent studies, such as Watkins & Biggs' (1996), and Kember (1998) provide the evidence that Chinese students consistently outperform their Western counterparts. It is also true that, when responding to questionnaires about their educational preferences, Chinese students do not appear to be rote learners (Watkins 2000) (for detailed information, see Chapter 2 Literature Review).

Watkins & Biggs' (1996) collection of research on Chinese learners provides a challenge to the widely-held Western beliefs or stereotypes about Chinese learners. Memorising and understanding are not separate parts but are one connected and interlocking procedure. Chinese learners rely on memorisation as part of the learning process (Kontoulis & Williams 2000; Witkins 2000). The Chinese system of learning is to become familiar with the text, to understand it, to reflect upon it and then to question it (On 1996, in Nield 2001:14).

This difference in interpretation emphasises the different understanding by different cultures concerning the relationship between memorising and understanding. Chinese learners often combine the processes of memorising and understanding, seeing memorising as a very important tool for learning. There are also different beliefs about ability and effort in relation to language learning. In the West, learners believe that high ability will bring success, and that failure is the result of low ability. Chinese EFL learners believe that effort and hard work can compensate for lack of ability (Jin & Cortazzi 1998). Chinese learners also believe that creativity comes on the basis of firm knowledge, skills, and technique. Only after these have been acquired can they become creative and hence more individual (Smith 1973; Chang 1993; Fang 1998).

Therefore, incomplete or inappropriate understanding of a national culture may cause different views and different conclusions about the EFL learners with a Chinese cultural background.

No matter whether it is positive or negative, there should be no denial that RL is used by language learners, and that it can be as effective as other strategies. It should also be noted that too little attention has been paid to the reason why Chinese learners never dispense with the traditional skills. Confucius passed away 2500 years ago and the “open door” policy in China has been in operation for more than 20 years. It should be worth the time and effort to do further study, to explore the reasons why Chinese learners have not chosen to adopt alternative learning strategies.

1.1.5 The necessity and importance of the present study

Taking all the above factors into account, it seems that more research is needed to determine the role of RL strategies with particular reference to Chinese EFL learners. A number of strategies specifically for learning vocabulary have been identified since vocabulary learning rapidly changed in status from the ‘Cinderella’ of language learning to an area of growing research and publication. MSs and their uses have also been studied extensively by researchers (e.g. Ran 2000 asks a whether memorisation is rote learning in a western sense or a route to understanding). It is evident from the abundant research literature that learners use a wealth of strategies to memorise words. However, the topic of RL as one of the MSs and its use by Chinese EFL learners is rarely discussed as a selected focus in professional journals or published books in applied linguistics. The relevant literature indicates that in the past, the majority of research into RL has been centred on Asian learners or Hong Kong-based

Chinese learners, to support educational reform for teachers (e.g. Watkins & Biggs 1996; Kember 1998; Rossiter's report on EAP PIM 2001). There are not enough specific studies of RL used by Chinese EFL learners in mainland China, or of the influence of learners' own beliefs, to see the reason why RL is so popularly used in the Chinese setting.

Thus, there is a compelling need to understand the role of RL better by looking at the learners' beliefs. It is the considerable gap in the literature in the relationship between Chinese EFL learners' beliefs and their RL as preferred learning strategies that this study intends to fill.

The following section will present an overall statement of the purpose of the present study.

1.2. Purpose of the whole study

To date there has been very limited research on the most important issue concerning Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the role of RL strategy choice and use in their vocabulary learning. Previous researchers such as Horwitz (1987), Wenden (1987) and Oxford (1994), found that beliefs do influence language learners' strategy choice. As discussed in the previous sections, the study of features of Chinese learners has emerged from recent developments in cultural, educational and psychological theories and show that Western misconceptions of Chinese learners are without foundation (e.g. Biggs & Watkins 1996; Bond 1996). Further, Kember's (1998) study of the learning experience of Asian students, addresses their "rote learning" as an integration of memorising and understanding. However, these studies do not focus on the specific or systematic study of Chinese EFL learners' beliefs

about RL, and most studies of the features of Chinese EFL learners relating to RL seem Hong Kong-based, whereas the area of mainland China, which is purely Confucian-based, seems neglected.

The purpose of the present study is to conduct further research on the features of Chinese EFL learners, to investigate mainland-based Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the role of RL in vocabulary learning and to look at their culturally-influenced preferences of memory strategy choice and use. The study has the following aims:

- (1) to promote a concrete understanding of the concept of RL in the literature;
- (2) to explore Chinese EFL learners' culturally-based beliefs about their preference for RL strategies;
- (3) to offer a challenge to widely-held beliefs that Confucian culture has a negative influence on learning;
- (4) to offer guidance to EFL teachers/researchers who are interested in Chinese EFL learners' memory strategy choice and use.

This study will focus on the following issues in relation to mainland-based Chinese EFL learners:

More specifically, a) whether they believe that they use more RL strategies than other memory strategies and the reasons why they do so; b) whether they believe that RL strategies are more effective than other memory strategies in EFL vocabulary learning, and c) whether they believe that RL strategies are helpful in all the stages of EFL vocabulary learning.

To these ends, the research **methods** were designed to gather information about Chinese learners' beliefs about learning and memorising EFL vocabulary and what role RL strategies play in vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs). The **subjects** were 100 students at four stages in the English Department at Shenyang Industrial University, Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, China. An additional subject group consisted of EFL teachers from a number of regions of China, whose views were sought on their students' use of RL strategies for purposes of generalisation. Instruments for data collection were principally a **questionnaire, a test and an interview**. For a detailed discussion of methodology, see Chapter 3.

1.3. The research questions

This research attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Do Chinese EFL learners prefer RL and believe that they use more RL strategies than other memory strategies?
2. Do Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies work better or worse than other strategies?
3. Is there any relationship between beliefs about RL and learners' achievement in the English vocabulary test?
4. Do Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies are helpful in all stages of EFL vocabulary learning?
5. What do Chinese EFL learners believe is the relationship between RL and other memory strategies?
6. Do Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies reflect traditional Chinese culture and values?

The data is analysed relating to these research questions and the findings are reported in Chapter 4—Statements of results.

It should be noted here that the hypothesis which is formulated as a possible response to the research questions will be discussed and summarised in Chapter 2 based on a review of the relevant literature.

1.4. The organisation of the study

In reporting the study, this thesis will proceed as follows:

This work is divided into six chapters:

Chapter 1. Introduction: firstly, presents an account of the necessity and importance of doing the present study and secondly explains why previous research has focused insufficiently on by Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about RL. Thirdly, a definition of RL is identified, based on the main features of repetition. Fourthly, it proposes the aims and research questions. It ends with the organisation of the whole thesis writing and the value of the current study.

Chapter 2 reviews the established findings concerning the beliefs about language learning strategies which are relevant to cultural background, in order to provide a strong framework and reference system for the study. Beliefs about Chinese EFL learners and RL, from both Western and Eastern researchers, are provided and analysed to indicate the different cultural beliefs about the nature of RL. The features of Chinese EFL learners will be discussed, including their beliefs and choice of strategies in relation to the influence of Chinese Confucian culture. Motivated by the literature review, precise research hypotheses are formulated.

Chapter 3 identifies the subjects and setting of the study and evaluates the instruments used---questionnaires, tests and interviews. This chapter also reports on the pilotage and discusses refinements to the methodology(and the analysis) arising from the evaluation of the pilot.

Chapter 4 reports the results of the study using statistical analysis to assess the validity of the research hypotheses.

Chapter 5 provides the discussion of the findings in this study, identifying the reasons underlying Chinese EFL learners' choice of RL and their continued reliance on RL in learning vocabulary. It also addresses the possible limits of the study, such as the small number of subjects and the limited time in China for data collection.

Chapter 6 summarises the major findings of the study and includes implications for future research in this field, recommendations for further study and applications of the findings to other context.

Finally, a bibliography and appendices, including a glossary, three instruments schedules and relevant research data are attached to the thesis.

1.5. The value of the study

The analysis of Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the role of RL in VLSs would provide information about Chinese learners, with an indication of the value of Chinese culture in EFL learning.

Information about the preference of RL in China, gathered in this study, will be of in understanding the relationship between Chinese learners' beliefs and their choice of learning strategies. The factors identified here may help to explain the preference of the use of RL strategies by Chinese EFL learners. This study will suggest that

centuries-old Confucianism has a considerable influence on Chinese learners of English as a cultural value in the utilization of RL strategies. The research will indicate that RL strategies in today's China are the extension or development of Confucian education. Practically, this research should provide some new cultural perspectives on RL and the results of this study may provide both language learners and interested researchers, not only with the valuable information about mainland Chinese EFL learners, but with the means to participate in helping to take forward the action necessary to realise a fuller picture of Chinese EFL learners in the field of applied linguistics.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

As has been indicated in Chapter One, rote learning (RL) has been widely accepted in the area of applied linguistics as the main feature of Chinese EFL learners. In previous studies relating to RL and Chinese learners, there seem to have been two large categories of conceptions of RL, either mere repetition without proper understanding or an integration of memorising and understanding. Specific cultural background seems reasonably attributable for both its positive and negative influence. The brief account of background information in the previous chapter suggests a gap in analysing Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the role of RL in EFL vocabulary learning. The aim of this study is to fill that gap, by exploring whether Chinese EFL learners hold positive beliefs about the role of RL in vocabulary learning and explore the reasons why.

In this chapter, relevant literature will be reviewed, underlying the necessity and importance of the present study. The findings from those previous studies which seem most relevant and useful to the present study will be discussed in creating hypotheses about possible outcomes, based on the research questions.

In the section that follows, the major findings relating to language learners' beliefs and learning strategies will be reviewed first.

2.1 Reviewing major findings concerning language learners' beliefs and strategies

Chapter One reveals that language learners' strategy choice and use reflect their beliefs, which are strongly determined by different cultural backgrounds.

Language educators have long recognised that learners bring to the language-learning task a complex set of attitudes, experiences, expectations, and learning strategies. Within this complex web of variables are *beliefs*; beliefs about the nature of language, about the language-learning task, about likely outcomes, about learners' personal language learning strengths and limitations (Sakui & Gaies 1999). The definition and the importance of language learners' beliefs have been discussed in the previous chapter (1.1.2). This section focuses on the major findings of studies by some researchers in this area, and the studies conducted by Horwitz (1987) and Wenden (1987) are predominately taken into account.

2.1.1 Horwitz' research

As Wenden (1987:103) concludes, "to date, except Horwitz (1987), no one has attempted to identify learners' explicit beliefs in any systematic way".

Horwitz developed an instrument, *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI) to assess students' beliefs about language learning in five major areas: 1) foreign language aptitude, 2) the difficulty of language learning, 3) the nature of language learning 4) learning and communication strategies, and 5) motivations and expectations. The 34 Likert-scale-item questionnaire, which was based on teachers' opinions in a free-recall task and on small group discussions with students, has both

research and training purposes. As a teaching instrument the BALLI has served as a useful stimulus in teacher workshops and in discussions with language learners as to how to improve their language learning strategies. According to Yang (1999:529), “The original BALLI (ESL version) contained 34 items. In a later version, Horwitz added one item (item 35-Language learning involves a lot of memorisation) which concerns the role of memorisation in language learning”. Further discussion in relation to this item will be provided with the review of Yang’s (1999) research later in this section.

The BALLI has proven very successful in the identification of many learner beliefs about language learning strategies. It provides a systematic assessment of learner beliefs which greatly facilitates later researchers in this area.

Horwitz’s (1999) review of representative studies (including American learners of French, Spanish, German, and Japanese, US university instructors of French, and Korean, Taiwanese, and Turkish heritage EFL students) using the BALLI has identified similarities and differences across cultural groups. As the researcher states (1999:559): “Although beliefs about language learning would seem to be naturally related to cultural and situational differences, to date there has been no examination of how they differ across learner groups”. Horwitz’s analysis suggests cultural differences between the American FL learners and the EFL learners. The Asian and Turkish heritage learners, for example, were found to be less convinced than the Americans about the relative difficulty of some languages, but believed more strongly that learning vocabulary is key to FL learning.

Although Horwitz’s (1999) research does not provide more precise data about belief differences in dealing with vocabulary learning and does not indicate preference for memorisation strategies, the BALLI has proved to be a useful instrument with which

to categorise these beliefs systematically. Horwitz's (1999) identification of cultural differences in beliefs about EFL learning, particularly about the difficulty and nature of language learning, could be related to the present study in that it has provided an indication that Asian language learners hold strong beliefs about vocabulary learning but do not seem to believe that language learning is very difficult. It also indicates the belief among Asian language learners that effort has more value than ability in language learning (reviewed later in this chapter). This view is reflected in the Chinese proverb, "Nothing is too difficult if you put your heart into it". However, the purpose of BALLI is to elicit commonly held beliefs, not to address specific beliefs held by particular cultural groups. Horwitz (1999) suggests expanding the scope of BALLI by identifying and adding beliefs particular to specific target populations. For example, Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about RL in EFL vocabulary learning, as specific beliefs in Chinese settings, remain unexplored.

2.1.2 Wenden's research

Wenden (1987) set out to investigate language learners' assumptions or beliefs underlying their choice of strategies. Her subjects, 25 adult ESL learners, were required to report on the social contexts in which they heard or used English. They were also asked to talk about language learning activities in which they engaged, in the classroom and outside. In her interviews, Wenden found that, in many instances, students could not only distinctly describe their beliefs about language learning but also adopted consistent learning strategies with their beliefs. Wenden's work indicated that these learners' explicit beliefs about how best to learn a language seemed to provide the logic for their choice of learning strategies.

According to McDonough (1995:92), rather than comb the transcripts of the interviews for instances of predefined strategies, Wenden used a rather different technique which she describes as “content analysis”. In her study, twelve explicit statements, representing learners’ prescriptive beliefs about how best to learn ESL and factors affecting ESL learning, were identified, defined and categorised into three main groups on the basis of the general overall approach to language learning.

Group1. Use the language

1. Learn the natural way
2. Practise
3. Think in your second language
4. Live and study in an environment where the target language is spoken
5. Don’t worry about mistakes

Group2. Learn about the language

6. Learn grammar and vocabulary
7. Take a formal course
8. Learn from mistakes
9. Be mentally active

Group3. Personal factors are important

10. The emotional aspect is important
11. Self concept can inhibit learning
12. Aptitude is important

These twelve statements are essentially a distillation of the subjects’ responses in interviews (McDonough 1995).

This “content analysis”, based on the learners’ reported statements, has been used as a model for the interview data analysis in the present study.

2.1.3 Gu & Johnson’s research

This research is directly related to Chinese EFL learners’ strategies in vocabulary learning and it seems to suggest negative beliefs about the use of RL which is taken for mere rote memorisation, although it does not focus on RL strategies.

Gu & Johnson (1996) used a vocabulary learning questionnaire (VLQ) to elicit 850 Chinese students’ beliefs about vocabulary learning and their self-reported vocabulary learning strategies. Beliefs about vocabulary learning in Section 2 of the VLQ included 17 statements representing 3 dimensions of beliefs: Vocabulary should be memorised (8 items); Vocabulary should be picked up naturally (4 items); and Vocabulary should be studied and used (5 items).

Gu & Johnson’s study profiled the beliefs and strategies of adult Chinese learners for learning EFL vocabulary. Contrary to popular beliefs about Asian learners, the participants believed that they generally did not dwell on memorisation, and reported using more meaning-oriented strategies than rote strategies in learning vocabulary. The three types of beliefs in this study show that, overall, these learners emphasised the belief that vocabulary should be memorised less than the other two belief categories. They predominantly believed that vocabulary should be carefully studied and put to use and they also tended to agree that words can be acquired in context.

Although the results indicate that these learners do not value RL as highly as other strategies, and that they employ a wide range of vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) such as guessing, dictionary use, note-taking, etc. or strategy combinations, the findings do not detail the explanation in accordance with their beliefs or why the

learners responded negatively to RL (except for oral repetition: see 2.2.1). What is more, the concept of RL in their study seems to be consistent with the Western “misconceptions” as mentioned in Chapter One. Gu & Johnson’s study suggests that RL means only rote memorisation without further consideration of cultural differences that might exist between the Eastern and Western learners. Some other studies (e.g. Biggs 1996, 1998; Kennedy 2002) suggest that RL with Confucian heritage cultures (CHCs) is a combination of memorising and understanding. The present study is not based on any single definition or conceptualisation of beliefs about RL, but to investigate as wide a range of beliefs as possible to determine what beliefs the subjects hold about RL and how their beliefs relate to CHCs. Gu & Johnson’s findings can be seen to be of value to the present study in that they motivate the researcher’s interest in looking in more depth at the learners’ beliefs about the role of RL in vocabulary learning, and whether they are positive or negative.

2.1.4 Sakui & Gaies’ research

The purpose of this study (1999) was to develop and validate an instrument and procedures for investigating almost 1300 Japanese learners’ beliefs about English language learning. The authors identify 3 primary aims for the study (p.473): 1) to validate a questionnaire, developed for the Japanese context and written in Japanese, on a variety of beliefs (e.g. person, task, strategy, achievement) about language learning; 2) to investigate the value of interview data to complement and explain questionnaire data; and 3) to describe the beliefs about language learning of Japanese

learners of English and to determine, through factor analysis, how those beliefs are organised.

Sakui & Gaies' analysis yielded four factors relating to Japanese students' beliefs about EFL learning: beliefs about a contemporary (communicative) orientation to learning English; beliefs about a traditional orientation to learning English; beliefs about the quality and sufficiency of classroom instruction for learning English; and beliefs about foreign-language aptitude and difficulty.

The value of this study for the present research lies in the collection and analysis data specifically related to beliefs; in the exploration of these beliefs using both questionnaire and in-depth interview; and in the use of factor analysis to organise and interpret. Although this study was Japanese EFL learner-based, the analysis of EFL learners' beliefs, with particular reference to beliefs about a traditional orientation to learning English, can be applied to the study of Chinese EFL learners.

2.1.5 Yang's research

Yang (1999) emphasised and developed the point made by Horwitz (1988:283), that knowledge of the relationship between learners' beliefs about language learning and their choice of strategy use should provide teachers with better understandings of their students' "expectation of, commitment to, success in, and satisfaction with their language classes". Yet how, specifically, are ESL/EFL learners' beliefs about language learning related to their use of learning strategies? This is the question which Yang's study addresses.

Yang's study, which was conducted with university EFL students in Taiwan, used a questionnaire composed of Horwitz's (1987) *Beliefs About Language Learning*

Inventory (BALLI), and Oxford's (1990) *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL). The results of factor analyses on the BALLI and SILL items in this study, as well as the results of Pearson correlations and canonical analysis of belief and strategy factors, identified a strong relationship between beliefs and strategy use. In particular, self-efficacy beliefs (which are beliefs related to personal judgements of performance capabilities in a given domain of activities) about learning English were associated with the use of various kinds of learning strategies, especially functional practice strategies (which involve actively seeking or creating opportunities to use or practice English functionally); and beliefs about the nature and value of spoken English were associated with the use of formal oral-practice strategies. Yang suggests that this relationship between beliefs and strategy use should be viewed as cyclical rather than uni-directional. That is, it is possible both that learners' beliefs lead to their use of specific learning strategies, and that learners' use of specific learning strategies shapes their beliefs about language learning. It is also possible that other factors may cause learners' beliefs and affect their use of learning strategies. "Not only does high motivation lead to significant use of language learning strategies...but high strategy use probably leads to high motivation as well" (Yang 1999, cited in Oxford & Nyikos 1989:295). Further, Yang's study also suggests some conflicting beliefs and strategy use, for example, the majority of the students (91%) agreed that "Language learning involves a lot of memorisation" (as Item 35 in the BALLI), "none of the learning strategy items were significantly correlated with this belief item" (p.526). Yang's finding indicates that while the students reported learning English by memorising English vocabulary, grammatical rules, and even whole pieces of English articles, they intended to use a limited inventory of MSs, perhaps for them MSs mean only rote memorisation.

Notwithstanding some conflicting beliefs and strategy use, this study exposes a strong relationship between beliefs and strategy use, which can serve as a theoretical support to the present research on beliefs about RL strategy use among Chinese EFL learners. The emphasis on the possibilities that other factors may cause learners' beliefs and affect their use of learning strategies has prompted this researcher to investigate whether there are any other factors affecting subjects' beliefs about the use of RL strategy. The non-significant relationship in Yang's study between Item 35 in the BALLI (which concerns the role of memorisation in language learning) and any strategy use has also aroused the researcher's interest in exploring belief differences in interpreting the use of RL with consideration of cultural background.

2.1.6 Summary

The previous studies investigating learners' beliefs about language learning strategies have made it clear that belief is an important factor affecting the choice of strategy use, and that beliefs about language learning strategies may vary from one cultural group to another.

Findings from the above studies reveal some aspects of research values influencing and guiding the implementation of the present study. Simply put, studies of learners' beliefs about language learning strategies reflect the following practical emphases:

- 1) Description and identification: As reported in several studies which utilised Horwitz's BALLI, beliefs about language learning strategies are described and identified. The representative research conducted by Horwitz (1987) set out to assess teachers' and student opinions on a variety of issues related to language learning. However, the early research on the beliefs and perceptions underlying choice of

learning strategies is mostly limited to identification of those beliefs (Wenden 1987:103).

2) The influence of different cultural backgrounds: Recent research on the beliefs of SL and FL learners has explored language learning beliefs of different cultural groups in a range of different contexts. But further research relating to specific beliefs held by particular cultural groups is still needed in the field of SL/FL learning strategies to systematically investigate the relationship between learners' beliefs and their strategy use.

3) Size and scope of studies: Some of the studies (e.g. Wenden 1987) have looked at a small number of learners, while others (e.g. Sakui & Gaies 1999) have focused on a large sample. Some have taken a narrow focus while others have had a broader scope. For example, the 12 statements (Wenden 1987) extracted from her data seem small in number compared to Horwitz's (1987) 34-item questionnaire (BALLI) and while 15 of Horwitz's questions coincide with Wenden's 12 themes, the remaining questionnaire items focus on other kinds of beliefs (e.g. about culture) which are excluded from Wenden's restricted set. Recent research has examined learners' beliefs about language learning strategies with particular reference to vocabulary learning strategies. The influence of different cultural backgrounds on the learners has been carefully considered and these studies have mostly investigated university-level or adult language learners, which provide rich information and experimental evidence for further studies in similar EFL settings.

4) Data collection and instrument: The widely accepted instruments for collecting data relating to learners' beliefs and language learning strategies are questionnaires, interviews, observations and tests.

According to Asbjornson (1999), there have been numerous studies describing language learning beliefs of different cultural groups, Sakui & Gaies' (1999) study is the only study to look systematically at language learners' beliefs on a wide scale. The consistency or reliability of respondents' choices was of great concern. Sakui & Gaies' study is an important step in creating a valid and reliable instrument, although it did not examine the relationship between beliefs and other individual differences such as strategies, aptitude, motivation and anxiety.

5) Data analysis: The most popular ways to analyse the data for beliefs and strategy use are methods such as descriptive analysis, factor analysis, and multiple regression analysis to show the statistical significance in the studies. For example, factors that constitute learners' beliefs have been identified through estimates of reliability using internal consistency reliability and factor analysis has been used successfully to categorise types of beliefs.

6) These studies also indicate some suggestions from a pedagogical point of view, and have demonstrated that teaching methodologies should be compatible with learner beliefs. For example, Yang's study (1999) has shown that a communicative approach to EFL teaching is necessary to meet the students' need of mastering speaking and listening skills.

These research studies have contributed a great deal to the field of language learners' beliefs about ESL/EFL language learning strategies. However, specific beliefs held by learners with particular cultural backgrounds need to be described in more detail and analysed in further depth. Beliefs about RL in China, with the largest EFL learning population in the world, have received little attention in the field of applied linguistics. So far, little information is available in the literature on the relationship between learners' beliefs and RL strategies in vocabulary learning. In what follows,

beliefs identified in the previous studies relating to the role of RL in VLSs will be taken into account in order to provide a basis for analysis of Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about RL in VLSs.

2.2 Beliefs about the role of RL in VLSs

RL has been defined in the previous chapter (see 1.1.1-2 (1) & 1.1.1-2 (2)), and the position of RL in the four large categories of MSs has also been presented (see 1.1.1-2 (4)). This section concentrates on different beliefs about the role of RL in VLSs among EFL learners.

Beliefs about RL so far can be divided into two broad categories: negative and positive.

2.2.1 Negative view of RL

RL is regarded by some researchers as primitive and misguided MSs. RL strategies seem to stress passive learning, which is frowned upon or despised by many researchers. In other words, RL is understood as the mechanical use of the memory without necessarily understanding what is memorised; and learning by rote, in this sense, means surface level learning. RL seems to be a hindrance in meeting the varied challenges of life.

A review of the literature reveals conflicting beliefs about RL strategies such as the use of vocabulary lists, oral repetition and visual repetition and there has been considerable debate about its effectiveness in comparison with other MSs. For

example, some researchers have conducted studies to investigate the effectiveness of repetition versus the keyword method (for a definition, see 1.1.1-2 (4)) for long-term or short-term retention, either under laboratory settings (e.g. Atkinson & Raugh 1975; Van Hell & Candia Mahn 1997), or in actual classroom settings (e.g. Rodriguez & Sadowki 2000, whose results will be discussed shortly). Overall, RL appears to be less efficient than the keyword method and these studies seem to have provided evidence showing the superiority of the keyword method over any other strategies in vocabulary learning. More specifically, research has shown that keyword methods are an effective device in accelerating learning speed and boosting immediate recall of L2 vocabulary (Liu 2001). Proponents of the keyword method regard RL simply as a meaningless repetition of information. This is the view taken by Craik & Lockart (1972) who describe RL as Rote-Rehearsal.

Some investigations into learners' beliefs suggest negative responses to certain types of RL. In Gu & Johnson's (1996) study, visual repetition of new words was the strongest negative predictor of both vocabulary size and general proficiency. In this study, statistical analysis also revealed the relationship between EFL learners' proficiency and their strategy use. The participants at the high proficiency level were more likely to use oral repetition, while those at the low proficiency level were more likely to use visual repetition [repeating a new word to oneself by writing it again and again]. Gu & Johnson (1996) described this as an ineffective strategy and categorised those who used it as *Passive Strategy Users*. In particular, this study also commented that the participants who relied most heavily on visual repetition had not learnt much after spending 7 years learning English as a school subject. They appeared to approach EFL using the kind of strategy they might have used in primary school to memorise Chinese characters, and were identified as lacking motivation to

learn EFL. Although visual repetition was found to be a negative strategy, however, oral repetition as a type of RL was seen to be relatively positive. This finding from Gu & Johnson's research has significance for the present study.

The study carried out by Rodriguez & Sadowki (2000) compared the effects of rote rehearsal [simply repeating new words until they can be recognised], context, keyword, and context/keyword methods on immediate and long-term retention of EFL vocabulary in natural classroom settings. Cued recall was assessed, either immediately, or after a 1-week delay. Results showed that the context/keyword method produced superior recall to any of the other 3 methods after 1 week. However, this study does not suggest a completely negative response to rote rehearsal: while the context/keyword method was found to be superior for long-term retention, the keyword and rote rehearsal methods were equally effective for immediate recall for the average performer in the English vocabulary test, although they differed inversely for students with different levels of English vocabulary knowledge. The keyword method was more effective for students with less than average English vocabulary knowledge, whereas rote rehearsal was more effective for students with above average English vocabulary knowledge. This indicates that there is definitely a positive role for RL among other MSs in EFL vocabulary learning and also seems to suggest a question for the present study as to whether RL is equally effective for learners with different levels of knowledge.

Some empirical evidence from recent studies strongly suggests negative beliefs among researchers about the role of RL. Martinsons and Martinsons (1996) attribute passive RL to Confucian-based cultural influence and argue that RL constitutes a formidable obstacle to creative learning, as management educators and developers seek to move away from knowledge transmission to learning facilitation, and to

cultivate a new generation of innovative Chinese managers. This study describes and examines a creative approach which has been successfully used to stimulate and challenge Chinese university students. It shows that the interactive and contextual learning techniques used by the authors have extensive applicability for educating managers and developing executives.

Other researchers present practical examples to demonstrate what they see as the ineffectiveness of RL. Cheung (2000), for example, argues that Hong Kong needs employees who are more creative: the type of free thinkers which the current education system fails to produce. He complains that Hong Kong's RL-based system seems to reward memorisation highly, but that students who have only learned to regurgitate facts often lack the thinking patterns needed to apply this knowledge to real-world problems.

Woodard (1998) states that South Korea's economic crisis has forced educators to rethink Confucian-style education with "test-aholic" students. The Asian financial crisis forced some students to give up studying in the US after it became too costly. She thinks some good may come out of the situation, arguing that the economic crisis may finally shift the emphasis to where it should be: providing a well-rounded education, rather than cramming for a standard university entrance exam in Korea.

In Woodard's (1998) view, South Korea's Confucian tradition---with its sterile emphasis on rote memorisation of facts, has promoted an education system which focuses on passing standardised, multiple-choice tests and qualifying exams. Critics say this "facts only" education leaves little opportunity for students to develop creative talents or critical problem-solving skills, and has contributed to the country's recent economic crisis.

If universities and colleges become more "customer driven," the students will become more diverse, competitive, and responsive to changing needs. One particular benefit might be the dismantling of the so-called "examination hell."

Nelson (2001) seems to support the above ideas that the rigid school system that emphasises RL has impaired students' learning abilities. Lucas (2000) also suggests that Hong Kong is set to abandon RL. Hong Kong's traditional RL will be replaced by more informal education as part of the efforts to develop a "new economy" workforce.

Overall, the researchers mentioned above believe that the Confucian-based, traditional oriental education system is not conducive to creativity. Employers frequently lament the SAR's (Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China) education system, complaining that it produces a labour pool with poor problem-solving skills and limited initiative. As Chaisci (1999) indicates, Singapore too is seeking to change its schooling to meet the demands of an innovative, technologically driven economy. In Japan, politicians are also realising the need for a different strategy (Schoppa 1991).

It seems that educational systems reflecting the influence of RL are considered to be the cause of the relatively lower creativity in students who have received education with RL strategies. In some countries, it can be seen that this view has already led to educational reform. Further review relevant to educational reforms in China will be provided later in this chapter.

2.2.2 Positive views of RL

Despite the negative beliefs about RL, the review of the literature also indicates positive beliefs about RL in vocabulary learning. RL is identified as a cultural preference and an effective way of getting basic knowledge in the early stages of language learning. It is felt that basic skills of learning can be developed through RL and RL may be beneficial for the accuracy of knowledge. The positive beliefs about RL also suggest that RL does not necessarily have to be meaningless repetition: it may help consolidate knowledge and deepen understanding.

Thompson's (1987) study indicates that there may be a cultural element in the utilisation of MSs in language learning. Language learners whose traditional cultures emphasise RL, may be more reluctant to use other strategies. A number of cultural differences in beliefs about language learning were discussed in the preceding section (see 2.1).

Besides the cultural element, Gairns & Redman (1986: 93) make the following comment on RL:

In the early stages of language learning, repetition gives the students the opportunity to manipulate the oral and written forms of language items, and many learners derive a strong sense of progress and achievement from this type of activity. For this reason it can be very valuable.

Schmitt (2000:132-133) also states:

Commonly used VLS [vocabulary learning strategies] seem to be simple memorisation, repetition, and taking notes on vocabulary. These more

mechanical strategies are often favoured over more complex ones requiring significant active manipulation of information (imagery, inferencing, Keyword Method). If we follow the depth of processing perspective, it would seem that learners often favour relatively “shallow” strategies, even though they may be less effective than “deeper” ones. Indeed, research into some “deeper” vocabulary learning strategies, such as forming associations (Cohen & Aphek 1981) and using the Keyword Method (Hulstijn 1997), have been shown to enhance retention better than rote memorisation. However, even rote repetition can be effective if students are accustomed to using it (O’Malley & Chamot 1990). If a generalisation can be made, shallower activities may be more suitable for beginners, because they contain less material that may only distract a novice, whereas intermediate or advanced learners can benefit from the context usually included in deeper activities (Cohen & Aphek 1981).

Thomson’s (1987) study seems also to suggest that it is more complex and takes more time using other MSs to retain a small amount of material, than using RL. If time is limited, widely accepted “advanced” MSs can lose their advantage over RL. So it seems that sometimes, mechanical strategies can be favoured over more complex ones.

According to Schmitt (1997:201), O’Malley *et al.* (1985) found that repetition was the most commonly mentioned strategy, with strategies requiring more active manipulation of information (imagery, inferencing, Keyword Method) being much less frequent. Carter (1987:153) identifies the positive results of repetition:

As Nation (1983) reports, large numbers of words are learned directly and, given sufficient repetition, retained. For example, research by Crothers and Suppes (1967) revealed that seven repetitions were sufficient for learners to master 108 Russian-English word pairs and that 80 per cent of a further 216

word pairs were learned by most of the control group of learners after only six repetitions.

As to the usage of RL, Lewis' (1999) text on *How to Study Foreign Languages* mentions the advantage of RL for exams, and indicates accuracy of knowledge leading to guaranteed and easy marks which appears consistent with widely-held beliefs (e.g. Parry & Su 1988).

Nation (1982) claims that RL is an effective way of learning a great deal of vocabulary in a short time. Tang's (2001) data from a classroom in China seems to support Nation's belief which will be discussed later (see 2.3.1). Carter (1987) identifies the method of learning words in context, but also claims that quantities of initial vocabulary can be learned both efficiently and quickly by method such as RL. Tinkham (1989) found that Japanese learners tended to have well developed rote learning skills, and he suggested that these should be put to good use rather than being neglected in favour of more communicative learning (Nation 2001:383).

As Gordon (2001) believed that there is no better way to develop basic skills except through RL: repetition -- regular correct practice over a period of time. This view is applied to the fields of music, sports, language and art that: the more often learners repeat an activity, the better they become at it. RL, contrary to the prevailing attitudes in public education, is not a "boring" activity that should be avoided. It is an essential activity that can be carried out in ways that make it stimulating and enjoyable.

The beliefs described above seem to partially support RL, as its advantage for vocabulary learning is overwhelmingly identified in the initial stages as being essential for the acquisition of basic skills.

Oxford (1999:70) provides some examples to show that some FL learners understand foreign words better by listening, reading or writing them repeatedly.

Milton, one of the students, listens to the weather report in French every day while eating breakfast. He is very familiar with weather related terms such as *le soleil* (sun), *chaud* (hot), *froid* (cold), and *il fait beau* (the weather is fine).

She states:

Although the strategy of repeating might not at first sound particularly creative, important, or meaningful, it can be used in highly innovative ways, is actually essential for all four language skills [listening, speaking, reading and writing], and virtually always includes some degree of meaningful understanding.

Nation (2001:74, 76) stresses that:

Repetition is essential for vocabulary learning because there is so much to know about each word that one meeting with it is not sufficient to gain this information, and because vocabulary items must not only be known, they must be known well so that they can be fluently accessed. Repetition thus adds to the quality of knowledge and also to the quantity or strength of the knowledge.

In the extensive literature comparing learning styles/strategies in Eastern and Western classrooms, a great deal of attention has been focused on the Eastern preference for RL, as opposed to the Western preference for the understanding of underlying principles and concepts. Ran (2000) argues that there is an unnecessary polarisation in much of this discussion. Drawing on interviews with parents and

children from sixteen Mainland Chinese families and observation of a Chinese handwriting class, it is suggested that the Western understanding of RL is ethnocentric. Indeed, in the West, memorisation has been strongly linked to a negative view of RL which leaves little room for understanding, while within Eastern philosophies of learning, memorisation has long been regarded as being an essential tool in supporting understanding.

Research into the features of Asian learners, reflecting RL as the combination of memorisation and understanding, identifies its contribution to EFL vocabulary learning (e.g. Biggs 1996, 1999).

Recent research indicates cross-cultural differences concerning the relationship between memorisation and understanding. Interestingly, Moore (2000:1) reports: “We saw rote learning in China and it works” Unfortunately, the reporter uses his words sparingly without offering a detailed description or explanation.

As discussed in Chapter One (see 1.1.4), Watkins & Biggs (1996) present learners with CHCs as a paradox. The evidence is that CHC students who seem to be oriented to rote memorisation achieve better than most Western students in high level academic tasks. Such is the “paradox of the Asian learners” (Watkins & Biggs 1996), which indicates RL with CHCs is not a passive rote memorisation, but a combination of memorisation and understanding.

Kember (1998), Coordinator of the Action Learning Project in Hong Kong, has identified three major misconceptions in understanding Asian students. First, where students have appeared to use rote learning material, it has not in fact been a surface approach, but an integration of memorising and understanding. Second, it is commonly believed that many Asian students prefer to be passive receivers of information. However, Kember’s research shows that students receive support for

their own initiatives. A third conception of Chinese students is achievement motivation. It is more of a social rather than an individual motivation as it is perceived in the West. Kember's work suggests widespread evidence of students forming groups to work together of their own volition. Kember concludes that many of the current conceptions about Chinese learners are, in fact, symptoms of the nature of the course requirements, rather than a function of the students themselves.

2.2.3 Summary

The survey of the literature indicates that there are two broad types of beliefs about RL. Negative beliefs focus on practical aspects while positive beliefs are based on explanation of its values.

The negative beliefs suggest that RL may be not as effective as other MSs in vocabulary learning and the results of using RL may stifle creativity, rob imagination, and destroy individuality. Such an approach may help students to pass examinations, but this has no value in real terms as it does not prepare them for the varied challenges of life. The positive beliefs suggest that RL is effective in the initial stages of vocabulary learning. Further, the literature review reveals current views among some researchers that RL is not meaningless repetition but can assist understanding.

The present study aims to demystify the paradox presented by Watkins & Biggs (1996) by exploring the deeply rooted, traditional educational beliefs and practices (e.g. centuries-old Confucian traditions, the heavy pressures of national exams, and beliefs about the need for RL strategies in vocabulary learning), which underpin Chinese EFL learners' strategy choices. Such a study needs to be rooted in an

understanding of the history of EFL learning in China, which will be explored in the next section.

2.3 EFL learning in China

The literature relating to RL for EFL vocabulary learning in China covers three broad aspects which are closely related to the beliefs of Chinese EFL learners: these are the influence of historical, of linguistic, and of cultural and educational factors on their beliefs about the use of RL strategies in China.

2.3.1 Historical background

2.3.1-1 The role of EFL in China

While English is taught in Chinese schools, its role as a world language does not play an essential role in national or social life.

The learning of English in China, however, has a long history and occupies the attention of millions of its people. How many millions is hard to say, since much depends on the level of proficiency one takes as the norm (Crystal 1985), but there are probably in the region of three hundred million people in China who are actively engaged in the job of learning English (Boyle 2000:14). As the most populous country in the world, China also boasts one of the largest populations of English learners and a history of over seven decades of English learning.

China's reasons for promoting the learning of English were well summed up twenty years ago by a team from the U.S. International Communication Agency after visiting five cities and many educational institutions in China:

The Chinese view English primarily as a necessary tool which can facilitate access to modern scientific and technological advances, and secondarily as a vehicle to promote commerce and understanding between the People's Republic of China and countries where English is a major language (Cowan *et al.* 1979, quoted from Boyle 2000:14).

This basic motivation has not changed since 1980, as can be seen from the Report of the English 2000 Conference in Beijing, sponsored jointly by the British Council and the State Education Commission of the People's Republic of China, in which reasons for the learning of English by the Chinese were summarised:

They learn English because it is the language of science, specifically perhaps of the majority of research journals. They learn it because it is the neutral language of commerce, the standard currency of international travel and communication. They learn it because you find more software in English than in all other languages put together (Bowers 1996:3).

The focus of China's present educational policy is to improve the country's intellectual outlook and produce competent students in all aspects of China's development.

The State Education Commission (SEC) is the chief administrative organ which oversees education in China. The SEC formulates and enforces policies, principles and laws concerning education, and co-ordinates the various governmental agencies' operation of individual schools. The government constantly deepens the reform of

the education system, and since 1978, has provided nine years of free education to children.

Strategically placing education over the development of other items, the Chinese government formulated the policy of “developing the country through science and education.” From 1976 to the present, with Deng Xiaoping’s re-ascension to power, the guiding principle was to bring about educational reforms to realise the “Four Modernisations,” viz., significant advances in the areas of agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology. “Oriented to modernisation, the world and the future” is not only the guiding principle for the development goal of Chinese education, but a principle for its daily educational reform and construction.

Since China’s outward orientation from 1978, there has been, in China, a flourishing growth of teaching and learning English as a foreign language from primary schools to universities and a popularisation of EFL among the people from all walks of life for work and leisure. The old saying “With the knowledge of mathematics, physics and chemistry, one will be hopeful in job-seeking all over the world” has been gradually changed into “Without knowledge of English, one will not be hopeful all over the world”. The curricula at all levels give pride of place to English courses, and vocabulary study and memorisation are always taken as the highlights of English learning. Thus, vocabulary becomes a major component of knowledge and to many Chinese learners, knowing more vocabulary serves as an indicator of being more knowledgeable in English.

Seeing China’s outward orientation, EFL learners as indicated in the literature are proud of choosing to specialise in English language learning at university. Chinese people nowadays have a stronger desire for having a good grasp of English with China’s door opening wider to the outside, instead of self-imposed isolation. They

believe that they must be good at one branch of knowledge, or one type of skill in today's China. To specialise in English learning today at university orientates their social status tomorrow.

Thus, Chinese EFL learners have plenty of motivation to learn English. The Confucian emphasis on education, regardless of social class, reflects the belief that all individuals have the potential to be developed.

As Maley (1995:47) states:

China is in a phase of industrial, scientific and commercial expansion which will make it the world's largest economy by the early years of the next century. In order to function efficiently in this role, it needs to bring large numbers of its people to high levels of proficiency in the use of English for a wide variety of functions.

English looks set to flourish in China--at least for the next ten or twenty years. As Boyle (2000:15) puts it: "At this stage in the last few years of the millennium, it does look as if China will continue to want English, and want it badly".

2.3.1-2 EFL learning history in China

Based on the studies described by Cortazzi & Jin (1996), Dow (1974) and Yao (1993), EFL history in China is summarised below in three broad stages: 1949-1966; 1966-1976; and 1977-1981. This overview begins in 1949, as there were very few FL learning and teaching programmes in Chinese schools before 1949 (Yao 1993).

Stage One: 1949-1966

Historically, the development of EFL teaching and learning in China has had several rises and falls since the People's Republic of China was established in 1949. English has been seen a "barometer of modernisation" (Ross 1992).

From the 1950s to 1966, FL learning in China was dominated by Russian. Russian was taught everywhere in China, from school pupils to university students. When the breakdown of political and economic links between China and the USSR came in 1960, there was a sudden adjustment in national language policy on the issue of foreign languages. With Russian out of favour, English was put at the top of the agenda. But owing to a decade lack of intention in English programme planning, there was a serious shortage of English teachers. To meet the sudden and urgent nation-wide demand for teachers of English, many institutions of higher education set up departments of English, and some started to select their best students to graduate one year earlier than usual, condensing four-year courses into three years, in order to supply more teachers for secondary education. Teacher training institutions began to run short term English courses for in-service teachers to help them refresh their knowledge of language and teaching techniques. However, it would take them several years of training teachers to fill the gap which was temporarily occupied by teachers of Russian. Meanwhile, the Chinese Department of Education began to recruit teachers from abroad for higher education. According to Yao (1993), the first group of British teachers came to China in the early 60s, which gave great impetus to the teaching and learning of the English language. For the first time since 1949, Chinese lecturers and professors of English had an opportunity to do research on FL

teaching in co-operation with teachers from the West. This came to an abrupt end, however, with the onset of the Cultural Revolution.

Stage Two: 1966-1976

Stage Two saw chaos and cultural destruction---a violent period in China resulting from the Cultural Revolution. China's economy and education were greatly hampered from 1966 to 1976. Anything from the West was considered bourgeois. All broadcasts in foreign languages were banned, and the few imported books were forbidden. FL teachers were said to be "victims of the influence of the bourgeoisie" and many of them, especially those who had graduated before 1949, were put into labour camps. Foreign teachers were expelled; schools and universities were closed. There was little teaching or learning activity: tutors and their students were frequently sent to the countryside or factories to receive "re-education" from the farmers and workers. Moreover, between 1966 and 1971, no new students were enrolled in higher education. EFL teaching and learning suffered a major setback.

With the first group of the worker-peasant-soldier students coming into universities in 1971, EFL teaching and learning activities began to recover. However, teachers were required to use textbooks specially developed for the Cultural Revolution, which were full of political slogans and this had an effect on the teaching and learning methods. After Deng Xiao-ping (a victim of the cultural revolution who resumed his position as Vice-Chairman after confessing) came back to power in 1972, the situation in higher education began to return to normal, and the academic climate was greatly improved. However, there were still the same constraints on the use of teaching materials.

Stage Three: 1977-1981

There was a period of renaissance in English teaching and learning from 1977 to 1981. In 1977, Chinese higher education began to enrol students by national examinations for the first time since 1966. Encouraged by their first enrolment, lecturers and professors, whilst dedicating themselves to their teaching, resumed research on methodology and teaching materials. The year 1977 witnessed the first group of foreign teachers coming back to China, which marked the turning point of FL teaching, particularly EFL teaching.

China's further opening to the outside world in the late 1970s brought about the flourishing of foreign trade and the economy as well as the rapid growth of cultural exchanges with the West and Japan. This situation encouraged more people to learn a foreign language and they tended to choose English or Japanese as their first foreign language, which resulted in the great expansion of English and Japanese programmes.

More changes in EFL teaching and learning from 1981 to the present will be covered later in following sections.

These three stages seem to suggest that the development of Chinese EFL teaching has been limited because of the political situation, which led to the use of inappropriate textbooks and ineffective learning methods. Learning EFL through political slogans, for example, can only lead to rote memorisation of vocabulary items or fixed phrases, thus there would be little opportunities for interaction or communication. During the whole of this period, EFL teaching and learning

concentrated almost exclusively on grammar rules and translation based on standard textbooks. It should be noticed here that the politically influenced nature of textbooks did affect the development of EFL teaching and learning methods in China. However, the grammar-translation method used in EFL teaching and learning in China, in fact, could be understood as a traditional Western approach to FL teaching and learning which was a result of the influx of Western teachers to China in the 1960s.

2.3.1-3 Textbooks and resources

Owing to China's isolation and the influence of its political factors, teaching materials used before 1976 were often adaptations either from classical literature such as Shakespeare, Dickens or Mark Twain, or translations from Chinese literature or other cultures. Therefore, what students were taught tended to be either "bookish" or "dead" language, or even Chinese translation into English, with great concentration on knowledge of grammar rules and lexical forms. Lehmann (1975, quoted by Stubbs, 1986), in a study of English language teaching materials in use in China, makes the point that little information about Britain or the USA was apparent in teaching material; and that students were usually more confident in discussing the Legalists and Confucius in China than the life of the people whose language they were studying. There are of course, very special reasons for this focus on Chinese content and lack of information about the West, which lie in the way in which China was almost completely closed to outside contact, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Though efforts had been made to improve the situation in 1968, with a result of "a flash in the pan", there was no fundamental progress until 1976.

In the late 1970s, a variety of linguistic schools of thought were introduced into China. First to be introduced were the theories of Leonard Bloomfield and the American structuralists. A series of textbooks compiled on structuralist linguistic principles were imported into English classes. For example, textbooks such as *New Concept English (1961)*, *English 900 (1964)*, *Look, Listen and Learn (1968)*, *Success with English (1968)*, etc., were used for elementary courses in higher education level. Meanwhile, textbooks characterised by conversations and pattern drills were developed domestically, such as English 1 to 6 for junior middle schools (People's Education Press 1979). Secondly, an American linguist gaining attention was Noam Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Grammar was gaining attention in Chinese university departments. Thirdly, functional linguistics, with its communicative approach (e.g. Wilkins 1976), came into the main stream, and has since become well established. For instance, *Follow Me (Alexander 1979)*, which was designed on the functional principle was a very popular textbook in China. English 1 to 3 (Liu 1990) for the present decade of junior middle school English courses was also compiled on the principle of functional linguistics.

If the 1980s was the decade for structuralists in China, then, the 1990s was the time for functionalists and the communicative approach. In 1979, two Canadian teachers and a Chinese teacher started to develop a set of functional teaching materials at the Guangzhou Foreign Languages Institute for students majoring in English in tertiary education in China (Li 1984) in answer to a demand for authentic English. As Ji states (1984:33), most textbooks in China did not have a communicative focus, so it was difficult for teachers to achieve a communicative goal.

The functionalists opposed both the traditional Western school of text analysis and the more recent structuralist approaches. The traditional text-analysis school looks

upon language teaching as a “knowledge-imparting” process, and language learning as a knowledge receiving process, which is one of quantitative increase of knowledge of the target language. The structuralist school lays down language skill as the objective with a focus on learning linguistic patterns through drill. Language skills are conceived of as a set of habits, and language learning as a “habit forming” process. For example, students might practise questions and answers with questions such as, “Is this a pen?” but functionalists maintain that this is meaningless if everybody can see it is a pen. Similarly, if students know each other’s name, there is little purpose in letting them ask each other, “What is your name?” The functionalists in China argue that it is not informative to let students read translations of the Story of Lei Feng, a hero in China, which every schoolchild in China knows by heart. The communicative school, whose object is communicative competence, regards language learning as an entirely active development process, with learners as the centre of action. Functional practice strategies involve actively seeking or creating opportunities to use or practise English and enabling learners to expose to EFL outside classroom. Some of the popular functional practice strategies used by EFL learners were: watching TV shows or movies spoken English or listening to English radio programmes, encouraging themselves to speak and start conversation in English. While a structuralist approach develops a knowledge of the English system, a functionalist approach cultivates the appropriate use of language in authentic social context, since “language is always used in a social context, and cannot be fully understood without reference to that context” (Wilkins 1976:16).

Today there are authorised textbooks and teaching materials for different courses at different university levels based on the attainment targets set in the Chinese National Curriculum. Tutors have the full right to decide which to use, or whether they will

use them or not, and have the right to use what is available in their own resource banks as supplementary teaching materials, to complement what the textbooks lack. In recent years, foreign teachers have brought in teaching materials and video-tapes from their native countries for classes such as oral English, extended reading and background study classes. Furthermore, most departments of foreign languages, funded locally or nationally, have now facilitated their own reference rooms, which provide the teaching staff with easy access to authentic materials in the form of audio or video tapes; journals, newspapers and magazines; course-books, reference books and dictionaries; texts on philology, literature and history and so on, to be used for teaching, research or learning.

2.3.1-4 Traditional methods and results

According to Harvey (1985), among foreign EFL teachers, teacher trainers, and specialists, there are a number of commonly held assumptions about Chinese learning methods and their effect on the teaching and learning of English in the People's Republic of China. A number of researchers have discussed Chinese learning methods in relation to EFL (e.g. Scovel 1982, Maley 1982) and have explored the relationship between the traditional methods and developments of EFL teaching and learning in China (e.g. Price 1975; Harvey 1985, Chen 1990, Rao 1996, Leng 1997, Ng & Liu 1999, Yang 2000).

Influenced by traditional Western FL teaching and learning approach before 1966, during 1966-1976, the Cultural Revolution and "closed-door" situation to the West, a teacher-centred, book-centred, grammar-translation method and an emphasis on the text as a collection of discrete units of information that should be memorised in order

to answer the anticipated questions have dominated English teaching in China as “surface approach” (Marton & Säljö 1976). Ji Feng (1984) identified the methods prevalent in the 1980s’ “intensive reading” class as “emphasising sentence-level analysis, grammar or vocabulary study” (p.33). Thus, there were few opportunities to use and practise spoken English in real situations as functionalists suggested.

These traditional language teaching approaches continue to dominate the typical Chinese classroom for learning English; that is, most of the interaction in the classroom is from the teacher to the students. There is little student initiative and little student-student interaction (Rao 1996). Thus, more long-standing Chinese approaches have affected the way in which functional practice ideas have been adopted.

In Insull’s (2001:35) study focusing on how to activate Chinese students in EFL classes, one of the students’ comments on EFL in a contemporary Chinese classroom was selected as a strong argument for pedagogical reform.

In China, the teacher is the centre of the class, the students are only listeners. They listen to the teacher all the time, hoping to get the correct answer from their teacher, receiving information without using their own minds. In order to save time or finish the teaching task on schedule, the teachers also gives students the answers, not encouraging them to think why.

Rao (1998:136) also describes the nature of a contemporary English class in China, indicating the lack of communicative strategies and appropriate teaching materials:

Each lesson in our textbook consisted of an English text, words and expressions with Chinese explanations and notes, comprehension questions, and translation questions. In class, what I did first of all was to follow my

teacher reading the new words and expressions by rote again and again, until we felt exhausted and couldn't stand it. Then my teacher explained the new words one by one....This kind of teaching turned us into bookworms. Many of us could read and understand English, but it was difficult for us to speak and listen to it. It was a case of inculcation rather than interaction, of being fed unwillingly rather than through practice.

These were the features based on a much longer-standing approach to learning in China and the students' accounts were what they remembered from the pre-reform era.

2.3.1-5 Method reforms

Since 1979, EFL teachers and learners in China have become increasingly aware of the need to update their English teaching and learning. Based on modern Western English language methodologies, and current Chinese educational practice, teachers have initiated a series of reforms based on a functionalist model, introducing approaches such as the audio-lingual method and the Guangzhou communicative English for Chinese learners project discussed above (Li 1984). In the late 1980s, some of the English textbooks for English majors in Chinese colleges and universities were compiled on the basis of the audio-lingual method, focusing on dialogue, sentence patterns, language structures, pair drills, and group discussions as a combination of structuralist and functionalist approaches. These endeavours and others were aimed at providing EFL students with opportunities to interact with each other and the teacher in the classroom and, therefore, to develop their English communicative competencies.

In 1979, Li Xiaojun and her colleagues in Guangzhou began writing and teaching a set of communicative English textbooks entitled *Communicative English for Chinese Learners (CECL)*. CECL asserts that “language is communication, and learning a language is learning to communicate” (Li 1984:2). Since that time, several projects such as *Junior English for China (JEC)* have integrated topics relevant to Chinese students and common daily expressions in communication with grammatical structure and flexibly-used vocabulary, reflecting a combination of structuralist and functionalist approaches. Thus a learner-centred method has been encouraged with “full rein...given to students’ initiative” (Li 1984:9). In the mid to late 1990s, the curriculum changed a lot to suit communicative teaching, and CLT (communicative language teaching) became popular in China (Liao 2000)

Cortazzi & Jin (1996:153) summarise the changes in ELT in China as follows:

The most significant recent change in ELT in China is the rise in the number of learners. In 1957 there were only 843 full time secondary school teachers of English in the whole country (Ross 1992:252) compared to current estimates that there are over 310,400 such English teachers (ibid:251) with over 57 million full time school and university students (Zhu & Chen 1991) and 150 million part time students learning English (Dzau 1990:32). Three reasons for this rise are: the general perception of the need for English as part of China’s modernisation, and hence the present key role of English in education; a new job opportunities requiring English in the rapid development of ‘socialist market economy’; and, of course, China has a large population, still increasing, which is now 1,202 million.

Vocabulary acquisition has been taken as the most important aspect of English language learning among this growing body of EFL learners. Many Chinese teachers

of English and most students stress the importance of learning vocabulary. There are far more books in Chinese bookstores on learning English vocabulary than on current English teaching approaches and methods (Cortazzi & Jin 1996).

A study of Chinese students' perceptions of their methods of learning vocabulary carried out by Cortazzi & Jin (1996) suggests that there is a significance difference in the frequency of use of specific vocabulary learning methods between the middle school and university. In the middle school, students relied mostly on textbooks, listening and speaking to teachers, note-taking, use of vocabulary cards and notebooks and translation, while at university a much wider range of methods was employed such as the use of radio, films and cassettes, peer learning and the use of essays, newspapers and literature, although some traditional features of the Chinese culture of learning have carried over from middle school to university such as listening to the teacher, taking notes and methods focusing on memorisation. The study concludes: "reasons for this seem to be a combination of developmental change, diachronic change, and differences in provision of facilities and language level reached...(Cortazzi & Jin 1996:163).

The above review of method reforms in EFL teaching/learning indicates a turning point from being teacher-centred to learner-centred in China, which has consistently reflected the pedagogical trend in the West. The use of communicative strategies seems to suggest that the way of learning vocabulary is no longer mere memorising, but diverse and combined with understanding and practising.

2.3.1-6 Limitations on Chinese EFL learners

As China's "open-door" policy has been increasingly advanced, China seems to have become more deeply involved in communicative language teaching and learning. However, some constraints are believed to limit the reforms in EFL teaching and learning methods. Leng (1997:38) describes this as "New bottles, old wine" to indicate the difficulties in catching up with the new trends.

One constraint is the framework by which teaching performance is evaluated. According to Leng (1997:38), teachers are graded in terms of how well they speak English, how well they demonstrate the language points, how well they use the blackboard or other teaching resources, and how well they discipline students. Students and their learning processes are largely ignored. As a result, students simply follow their teachers rigidly and mechanically. Such a situation leaves students no time for interaction or communication.

Tang's (2001) explanation of VLSs in the Chinese EFL classroom identifies another constraint, related to receptive rather than productive vocabulary learning. She reports that teachers in China spend a substantial amount of time dealing with vocabulary, but that the vocabulary teaching strategies are limited to the methods which require less time and cover the most vocabulary items. While the students are able to keep receptively-learnt vocabulary items in their lexicon in the short term. As soon as the examination is over, the memory of such passive-learnt items is gone too. These methods do not create opportunities for practice and application of the vocabulary items taught. Tang's study suggests that the Chinese students need more exposure to appropriate vocabulary activities which aim at production (speaking and writing) in order to reach the standard of English required for studying abroad.

2.3.1-7 Summary

The overview of the history and development of EFL teaching and learning in China indicates a range of factors both internal and external, which have affected teaching and learning strategies. Traditional teaching methods embedded both in Chinese cultural heritage (see 2.3.2) and in traditional Western approaches (e.g. teacher-centred, examination-oriented MSs) have proved hard to remove in order to keep up with changing world trends. In spite of the influence of both structuralist and functionalist approaches to teaching and learning, older pedagogical traditions in China have continued to have the greatest influence on pedagogical practice. As the open door policy was administered more than 20 years ago in China, there seems to be an indication of understandable worries that China will fritter away its record of success in teaching and learning reform if methods remain unchanged or changed at a minimal level.

However, the worries may be unnecessary, for there is a body of research that suggests Chinese EFL learners are highly motivated and actively cooperative with teachers for EFL vocabulary learning. Furthermore, research has shown (e.g. Lewis 1999; Parry & Su 1998) that even the vocabulary items learnt through “passive” RL can help in exams. More research is needed to determine whether there are any other reasons for Chinese EFL learners to keep RL strategies. A close look at the influence of the Chinese linguistic background on Chinese EFL learners will serve as a further explanation for the reasons why RL still appears to be popularly used in China.

2.3.2 The influence of the Chinese linguistic background on EFL VLSs

Another reason for the use of RL is that all the basic written units of Chinese, the characters, have to be learnt by heart individually. This has a significant impact on the way English is learned in China, and may predispose some Chinese students to spend considerable time on memorisation at the expense of practice in context (Chang 1993:253).

In this section, some characteristics of Chinese language will be discussed at the outset, followed by an overview of research relating to the influence of a Chinese linguistic background on Chinese students' use of RL in EFL learning.

2.3.2-1 Some characteristics of the Chinese language

It is useful first of all to review some main characteristics of the Chinese language, and these will be briefly set out here.

To the outsider, China is an enigma, linguistically, socially, culturally, and geographically (Harvey 1985:183). Boyle (2000:14) also states: "Among the many different aspects of China which have fascinated the West are the sheer size of its population, its remote and mysterious culture, and the intricate difficulty of its language". However, after a close look at the Chinese language, the sense of mystery will be cleared away.

The Chinese language, which integrates both meaning and pronunciation information in its characters, is understood and appreciated by the Chinese people as one of humanity's greatest and most enduring cultural achievements. Until recent centuries China had one of the highest literacy rates in the world and more than half of the

world's literature was written in Chinese. Due to the central role of calligraphy in Chinese art and the influence of Chinese civilisation, Chinese characters have held a similarly pre-eminent position in the world's art, of which Chinese people are very proud. Chinese characters are the basic carriers of the traditional Chinese culture, and, as an important tool for extending, spreading and exchanging ideas, they have played a critical role in the long history of the Chinese nation. One may well argue that without Chinese characters Chinese culture would not have achieved the splendours it did.

While there are many spoken languages (dialects) in China such as Standard Chinese or Mandarin (*Putonghua*, based on the Beijing dialect), *Yue* (Cantonese), *Wu* (Shanghaiese), *Minbei* (Fuzhou), *Minnan* (Hokkien-Taiwanese), *Xiang*, *Gan*, *Hakka* dialects, and other minority languages, only Mandarin (or *Putonghua*, based on Beijing dialect) has a corresponding written form, which is shared by all literate Chinese whatever regional language they may speak. For this reason, the term Chinese is used in this study to refer to Mandarin.

Chinese is not an Indo-European language, but belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family of languages, with a unique and complex relationship between the Chinese phonological system and written script (Chang 1993). Chinese is a monosyllabic and tonal language. Every written Chinese character represents a syllable with a tone. There are five different tones including *Qingsheng* (light or unstressed), *Yinping* (high-pitched); *Yangping* (rising); *Shangsheng* (falling-rising) and *Qushen* (falling). Every written Chinese character comprises a combination of different strokes, and may contain up to 24 strokes in total. Most characters contain a phonetic element. Such characters are known as *phonograms* or *radical-phonetic* characters. They are made up of two components, one called the *radical* ("*Bushou*", section headings)

which indicates the classification of the character and the other the *phonetic*, which should give a clue to its pronunciation (Scurfield, 1991; Wilkinson, 2002). In the study of the composition of Chinese characters, there is a traditional theory known as *Liu Shu* (six writings, Xie, 1996). That is, there are six types of characters: *Pictographs* (originally stylised pictures of objects), *Ideographs* (suggesting an abstract idea and expressing more complex ideas or concepts than *Pictographs*), *logical aggregates* (combining the meanings of different characters to create a new meaning), *phonetic complexes* (combining the meaning of one character with the sound of another), *Associative transformations* (extending the meaning of a character to a related concept) and *Borrowings* (giving an unrelated meaning to a character, generally that of a spoken word which has the same pronunciation as the borrowed character but lacks its own character). Although many of the earliest Chinese characters were *Pictographs* as known in the world, the Chinese script is an ideographic writing system, in which the graphic structure is directly related to the meaning (Xie, 1996:1).

Written Chinese, unlike written European languages is not based on an alphabet principle (Scurfield & Song 1996). Various ways have been devised for representing Chinese sounds alphabetically. The standard form in use today is known as *Pinyin* (literally “spell sound”). In 1958 *Pinyin* was adopted as the official system of romanisation in the People’s Republic of China. This is the system used throughout this thesis. However, such representations may be misleading, as they may lead Western readers to assume that Chinese writing is based on phonetic principles. There is no link between Chinese characters and pronunciation, and it is impossible to tell how a character is pronounced just by looking at it. However, Jin & Cortazzi’s (1998:753-754) study offers the following comments:

Many characters, contrary to popular Western myths ((De Francis 1984), have an internal structure of “radicals”, which indicate the general meaning, and “phonetic elements”, which are a rough guide to pronunciation. This means that they are not necessarily learned by rote, as some Western observers have supposed, ...they can be learned analytically....

Jin & Cortazzi’s view indicates the possibility to use an analytical method through association to learn Chinese characters rather than relying on mere rote memorisation. However, to get “general meaning” and “a rough guide” to pronunciation, is not consistent with CHC learners’ strong desire for “accuracy”. Learners with CHCs prefer the consolidation of basic knowledge (see 2.3.3). It should be emphasised that it is the *written* form of Chinese, rather than its spoken forms, that demands strategies such as rote memorisation. However, it should be also noticed that repetition is widely encouraged by Chinese parents and early years teachers as a way of promoting children’s *oral* language development (Leng, 1997). Next section will look at some aspects in which the methods of learning Chinese have influenced on English vocabulary acquisition.

2.3.2-2 The influence of the methods of learning Chinese on English vocabulary acquisition

As many researchers have pointed out (e.g. Chang, 1993; Kennedy, 2002), the use of RL in learning written Chinese arises from the need to memorise both the characters and collocations such as phrases and proverbs. Kennedy (2002:432) points out that when learning to write their own first language, Chinese students have to copy out

and memorise thousands of written characters, a process which establishes RL as a primary learning strategy.

There are approximately 50,000 Chinese characters, each of which is written with specific strokes and in a specific order. As Brett puts it (1997:3) every character must be chewed to extract its juice. This indicates that even when it is not essential, RL play an important part in Chinese language learning for CHC learners.

The way of memorising *Pinyin*

Pinyin, the phonetic spelling, is taught to children by recognising, reading and memorising the sequence, just as the English alphabet is learnt in China. People learn the English alphabet by heart in exactly the same way as learning Chinese Pinyin, and mistakes in the sequence are seen as unacceptable. In the Chinese phonetic alphabet, the sequence is also strictly memorised. In learning English, therefore, rote learning of the alphabet naturally comes first.

The attention to the importance of the tones

One of the elements that make the Chinese language different from many other languages is the use of varying tones in the pronunciation. The use of an incorrect tone can completely change the meaning of a word or make it incomprehensible. For example in Scurfield (1991), the Pinyin *ma* will give different meanings because of the four different tones. *mā* (*mother*), *má* (*hemp*), *mǎ* (*horse*), *mà* (*scold*) For this reason, Chinese EFL learners pay close attention to the pronunciation and intonation

of English words, and beginners learn English at a slow and steady speed to avoid any mistakes in these areas.

The way of memorising strokes

Chinese, as a character-based language (De Courcy, 1997:242), has a different way of representing the meanings from European languages. Chinese characters consist of different strokes, with each stroke needing to be written in specific ways and in a set order (Jin & Cortazzi 1998:754). To learn the correct stroke order for each character, students are often required to remember analytical writings of single characters. For example, in the character (*ren* ‘bear’), the upper part is a knife and the lower part is a heart. Chinese learners remember this using the saying that ‘bear’ means that a knife is hanging above the heart. Similarly, RL is used to remember the name of each stroke (*dot, horizontal, perpendicular, etc.*) and the names of the radicals for each character. This way of learning the strokes that form Chinese characters strongly affects Chinese EFL learners’ approach to learning English words. Chinese people tend to memorise the spelling of each word as carefully as dealing with the order in which to combine the strokes.

The way of memorising compound words

Chinese students are taught to combine individual characters into compounds with a new meaning. For example, *hui* (“go back”) and *jia* (“home”) could be combined into *huijia* (“go home”). That is very similar to English combined words. For example, the English word “homework” is made up of two single words “home” and

“work”. Therefore, it seems automatic for Chinese EFL learners to memorise English combined words with the previous experienced ways of learning Chinese compounds.

The way of memorising collocations and proverbs

Collocations, proverbs or idiomatic expressions in Chinese can all be learnt by RL, the reason being that they are “fixed” forms which can not be changed. Chinese people are good at using proverbs, which require four or eight characters, often with literary allusions or quotations, sayings or maxims.

English proverbs or idioms are understood by Chinese EFL learners in the same way, and are therefore seen to be amenable to learning by RL (a view supported by Warren’s (1994) in the *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary of English Idioms*). The word “idiom” is used to describe the “special phrases” which are an essential part of a language but which are impossible to guess, as they rely on tradition of usage rather than on common sense. For example, learners may feel they can only learn by memorisation that “cool as a cucumber” is “correct”, while “cool as a carrot” is not.

The review of the methods of learning Chinese suggest that RL plays an important role in forming the way of Chinese learners’ learning EFL.

However, as Biggs (1998:726-727) points out, there is more to this process than mindless memorisation:

...learning the thousands of characters in common use obviously requires a good deal more repetitive learning than learning an alphabet system. However, this cannot be mindless rote learning because understanding is

assuredly involved. Characters are traditionally learned by the Two Principles. The first Principle involves using the Five Organs: the eyes to see the shape, the ears to hear the sound, and the hand to write the shape, the mouth to speak the sound, the mind to think about the meaning. The Second Principle is to contextualise; each character as it is learned is formed with another into a word and each word is formed into a sentence. Repetitive certainly, but also embedded in meaning, with much use of learner activity in widely different modes.

Xie (1996) describes the nature of the Chinese script which is directly related to the meaning (see 2.3.2-1). Biggs' view above has indicated that learning the characters takes place in the context of thinking about meaning. Thus, it may suggest that if RL is linked to *meaning* which is embedded in Chinese learners' approach to learning their own written script, this is likely to affect their approach to vocabulary learning in English. Meara's (in Swan 1997:175) research suggests that different languages may have different preferred techniques for word-storage and handling, then it is possible that learners will continue to use these strategies for handling English words.

2.3.2-3 Summary

The review of the influence of a Chinese linguistic background on using RL strategies suggests that the way of learning Chinese, particularly written Chinese, plays a significant part in the way English is learned in China. The findings from the literature suggest that Chinese EFL learners' use of RL is associated with the strategies already used in learning the Chinese language. It remains to be

demonstrated in this study how the participants reveal their beliefs about the influence of a Chinese linguistic and cultural background on the use of RL strategies.

2.3.3 The influence of cultural and educational background

Existing literature in the field tends to trace back to Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHCs) for an explanation of the use of RL in China. Many studies (e.g. Chang 1993; Martinsons & Martinsons 1996; Rao 1996) suggest that the cultural and educational background that characterises Chinese EFL learners has stemmed from the influence of Confucius, the first teacher of China. Confucius' sayings and maxims have been mottos to countless generations in China, which has enjoyed an unbroken history of some 5,000 years. According to Fang (1998:26), China is the world's "longest continuous civilisation with the longest tradition of record-keeping and collection" (Ropp 1990, p.x). Chinese people are proud of their culture, and a strong sense of cultural superiority is ingrained in the Chinese mind. The "xenophobic" Chinese view is evident, even in the name "China", which literally translates as the "Central Kingdom", because the Chinese have always held themselves culturally in high esteem, viewing their culture and nation as lying in the center of human civilisation.

A definition of Chinese culture, and the predominant influence of Confucius, has been discussed in Chapter One (see 1.1.3-2). However, a close look at Confucianism may provide further understanding of Confucius' educational principles and their impact on students' choice of learning strategies.

Here the researcher will devote a little space to outlining the main works in the literature which are believed to reflect Confucius' moral and political philosophy,

before moving on to review RL and the Confucian-heritage learning culture, with the aim of clarifying the sources for the Confucian tradition in China.

2.3.3-1 Confucianism

It should be made clear here that in this study, the Western terms “Confucius” and “Confucianism” have been used throughout, but the *Pinyin* [phonetic symbols for the pronunciation of Chinese language] system of Romanisation has been used for Confucian scholars’ names or Chinese historical terms, except for direct quotations, for the sake of consistency.

According to Chinese tradition, Confucius (551-479 BC) was a thinker, political figure, educator, and founder of the *Ru* School of Chinese thought.

Ru means “soft,” “gentle,” “enduring,” and, sometimes, “weak.” Very likely the term *ru*---evoking a commitment to learning, refinement, cultural accomplishments, and the practice of rites and music---came to be applied to persons whose notion of virtue had more to do with decorous conduct than with martial prowess (De Bary and Bloom 1999:41).

The principles of Confucianism are contained in the nine ancient Chinese works handed down by Confucius and his followers, who lived in an age of great philosophic activity. These writings can be divided into two groups: the Five Classics and the Four Books.

The *Wu Ching* (Five Classics), which originated before the time of Confucius, consist of the *I Ching* (Book of Changes), *Shu Ching* (Book of History), *Shih Ching* (Book of Poetry), *Li Chi* (Book of Rites), and *Ch'un Ch'iu* (Spring and Autumn Annals). The *I Ching* is a manual of divination probably compiled before the 11th

century BC, but its supplementary philosophical portion, contained in a series of appendices, may have been written later by Confucius and his disciples. The *Shu Ching* is a collection of ancient historical documents, and the *Shih Ching*, an anthology of ancient poems. The *Li Chi* deals with the principles of conduct, including those for public and private ceremonies; it was destroyed in the 3rd century BC, but it is presumed that much of its material was preserved in a later compilation, the Record of Rites. *The Ch'un Ch'iu*, (Spring and Autumn Annals) the only work in the *Wu Ching* reputedly compiled by Confucius himself, is a chronicle of major historical events in feudal China from the 8th century BC to Confucius's death early in the 5th century BC.

The *Shih Shu* (Four Books), compilations of the sayings of Confucius and Mencius and of commentaries by followers on their teachings, are the *Lun Yü* (Analects), a collection of maxims by Confucius that form the basis of his moral and political philosophy; *Ta Hsüeh* (The Great Learning) and *Chung Yung* (The Doctrine of the Mean), containing some of Confucius's philosophical utterances arranged systematically with comments and expositions by his disciples; and the *Mencius* (Book of Mencius), containing the teachings of one of Confucius's great followers. (on line, available: <http://www.encarta.msn.com>).

2.3.3-2 The relationship between Confucianism and RL

As has been discussed in Chapter One, RL as a salient feature of Chinese learning strategies is widely acknowledged to be due to Confucian influence which has lasted for 2500 years. The question is, how this belief was established and how it is linked to Confucius' teaching. Although the literature indicates RL has stemmed from the

influence of Confucianism (e.g. Chang 1996; Martinsons and Martinsons 1996; Cheung, 2000), there is no exact evidence that these researchers have carried out deep analysis of RL relating to Confucianism. Indeed, when they discuss the use of RL in China, they describe it nearly as simple rote memorisation without proper understanding. The value of CHCs in developing the use of RL for deeper learning seems to be ignored.

In China, “traditional” is often synonymous with “Confucian”. Louie (1986:ix) states that Confucianism traditionally stood for respect for learning, authority, and orthodoxy. A hallmark of Confucius’ thought is his emphasis on education and study. Since the purpose of this review of Confucianism is to investigate the roots of RL in Chinese tradition, the emphasis will be placed on Confucian education in relation to teaching and learning methods rather than on other aspects such as philosophical thoughts on interpersonal relationships.

From a historical perspective, the main body of Chinese educational texts arises from Confucianism, including Confucian canons, commentaries by Confucian scholars, and standard histories that are intended to verify Confucian political theories. These texts formed the basis of educational practice in Imperial China, where memorisation was the primary learning methodology. From 205 BC till 1905, students from age five had to start memorising the *Four Books* and *Five Classics* of Confucian doctrines. In the learning process, the student was not trained for any creative thinking and was not given any opportunities to express any opinions which were inconsistent with the orthodox view. In classroom presentation and paper writing, the student was required to demonstrate what he had remembered based on his textbooks and the teacher’s explanations, but he was not expected to say what he thought of them (Ze 1995:1-5).

Thus, the Imperial examination which was based on the four Books and Five Classics required RL. Rote learning of the Confucian classics was fundamental to success in the exams, and the scholar who obtained the highest degree, the *Jinshi*, would have his memory trained to a tremendous degree. Texts of over 400,000 characters had to be thoroughly memorised (Crozier 2002:1-2).

While it is clear that the Imperial examination requires the memorisation of Confucian classical works by RL, the influence of Confucian teachings over the centuries on learning methods may reflect different factors. As indicated in the previous chapter (1.1.3-2), the Confucian tradition is dynamic, complex and evolving with changing practices in teaching and learning which go beyond simple memorisation. Thus it is not easy to summarise Confucian beliefs and values about education (Biggs 1998:729). Examination system reform and development including Confucian teachings in the Chinese tradition will be reviewed later in this chapter.

Although no study has yet examined in detail the relationship between Confucianism and beliefs about RL, a number of conclusions can be drawn from studies that have touched on the central tenets of Confucianism: the hierarchy and conformity in social relationships demanded by the *Wu Lun*, the five basic human relationships (see Table 2.1 below) and the requirements of the *keju* examination system in ancient China.

It might be said that Confucius' authoritarian principles (the establishment of unequal relationships between people) have led to the adoption of RL strategies, based on great respect for those teaching and passive subordination by those being taught. Traditionally, this respect was for a class of scribes who distinguished themselves, not by personality, or even by ability (Crozier 2002), but by formal learning, and maintained their prestige by a system of examinations based on the study of ancient works. The student's aim was thus to imitate or aspire to the pre-

eminence of the scholar. The ancient texts on which the examinations were based are diverse in content, but they all teach, rather than inviting the student to question, concepts of personal cultivation and the handling of interpersonal relations, pragmatic political ideas, and utilitarian philosophical thoughts (Su 1998:37).

In Confucianism, rules are spelled out for the social behaviour of every individual, governing the entire range of human interactions in society. The basic teaching of Confucius is distilled in the Five Constant Virtues: humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faithfulness (Li Wei, 1994). Confucius further defined five basic human relations and principles for each relation (Li Wei 1994; Bond 1996) called *Wu Lun*. The table below presents these five relationships.

Table 2.1 Five relationships and their principles

Basic Human Relations	Principles
Sovereign and subject (or master and follower)	Loyalty and duty
Father and son	Love and obedience
Husband and wife	Obligation and submission
Elder and younger brothers	Seniority and modelling subject
Friend and friend	Trust

Source: Fan (2000:4)

As Bond and Hwang (1986:216) state:

In summary, the essential aspects of Confucianism in constructing a Chinese social psychology are the following: (a) man exists through, and is defined by, his relationships by others; (b) these relationships are structured hierarchically; (c) social order is ensured through each party's honouring the requirements in the role relationship.many aspects of Chinese social behaviour can be linked to this distillate of Confucianism.

In accordance with Confucian tenets, society is hierarchically ordered, with due respect shown for age, seniority, and rank. Many researchers argue that this hierarchical structure has reinforced unequal relationships between people (e.g. Chang 1996; Martinsons & Martinsons 1996) leading students from Confucian heritage culture automatically to adopt passive role in relation to their teachers. Subordinates are expected to follow, without questioning, the decisions of their superiors, and learners are trained to be obedient and to learn by imitation and memorisation from kindergarten onwards (Leng 1997:38).

Influences such as these on EFL learners' choice of learning strategies, along with the influence of the educational settings in which they learn the FL, have been the subject of several research studies (e.g. Rubin, 1975; Harvey, 1985; Huang & van Naerssen, 1987; Green and Oxford, 1995 Parry and Su, 1998). For example, Huang and van Naerssen (1987) emphasised that Chinese EFL learners' memorisation strategies were clearly influenced by traditional Chinese reverence for knowledge and wisdom as reflected in books, and the practice of memorising this wisdom as a way to gain knowledge (Sheorey 1999).

2.3.3-3 The Imperial examination system and its development

It can be seen from the above discussion that while there is no definite *consensus* on the exact reasons for beliefs about Chinese traditional RL, one of the roots of this tradition is perceived to lie in *keju* (the Imperial examination system) and its requirement for the memorisation of the Confucian classics. A closer examination of this system is therefore relevant to the present study.

The following review of China's Imperial examination system and its development primarily stems from the work of Berthrong & Berthrong (2000), Bond (ed. 1996), Crozier (2002), De Bary and Bloom (eds. 1999), Louie (1986) and Su (1998). Some historical personages mentioned in this section are all included in Appendix 5 Glossary.

Crozier's (2002: 2) states:

The most truly unique aspect of Chinese culture—and the one with the most powerful legacy—is the Confucian examination system with which the Son of Heaven's empire was staffed with civil servants over the best part of two millennia. The imperial examinations represented a remarkable attempt to create an aristocracy of learning, which in itself represent a remarkable advance over the warrior and hereditary aristocracies that dominated in the rest of the world. The Chinese examination system, archaic, laborious and daunting as it may have been, was nevertheless, a glorious attempt at intellectual meritocracy.

Furthermore, Crozier (2002: 5-6) identifies the importance of the meritocratic system which the Imperial examination established:

...the most important legacy of the imperial examination system is surely the massive academic effort channelled into the National University Entrance Examinations in China each year.... The current university entrance system is far from perfect; but for thousands of diligent students, it offers a ladder from provincial village schools to the nation's best universities.

The Imperial examination system, which was created as a means to recruit qualified officials for civil service on the basis of the study of the Confucian classics, was employed from the Han dynasty (205 BC-220 AD) until it was abolished by the Empress Dowager in 1905 under pressure from leading Chinese intellectuals. Because success in the examination system defined social status and because education was the key to success in the system, education was highly regarded in traditional China, being seen as the mark of elite culture. Indeed, education is central to Confucianism; and one of the favourite titles for Confucius was “the First teacher”.

Crozier (2002) examines how China's Imperial examination system and its modern remnant—the *Eight Legged Essay* (a rigid traditional format) and the current *Gao Kao* (the National University Entrance Exam)—are unique attempts in world history to aim for a government of wisdom.

While the origins of the exam system lie in the Han dynasty (205 BC –220 AD), the early scholarly examinations were consolidated during the Sui dynasty (581-618), and began to be truly effective under the Tang dynasty (618-906). In the Tang dynasty, the examination system was reorganised and more efficiently administered. Because some scholars criticised the emphasis on memorisation without practical application and the narrow scope of the examinations, the system underwent further change in the Song dynasty (960-1279). Wang Anshi (1021-1086) reformed the

examination, stressing the understanding of underlying ideas and the ability to apply classical insights to contemporary problems. In the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the commentaries of the Song Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi (1130-1200) were adopted as the orthodox interpretation of the classics. (More detailed information about the developments of Confucian education concerning learning methods will be reviewed in the next section).

Although between the Tang dynasty (618-906) and the late Qing dynasty (1905), the civil service examinations dropped out of use for short periods and underwent occasional reform, the content remained remarkably constant. Until the Guangxu Reforms of 1898, the notorious eight-legged essay, a rigid traditional format, was the mainstay of the exam papers. The core of the texts remained the Four Books and the Five Classics, along with a number of approved commentaries. Until the Imperial examination system was abolished in 1905, students memorised the Confucian classics and Zhu Xi's classical commentaries as their preparation for the examinations. The Chinese bourgeois democratic revolution led by Dr Sun Yat-sen overthrew the Qing dynasty in 1911, and so the imperial examination system was eliminated, once and for all. Ever since then, the use of examinations to select officials has been done away with.

Crozier (2002:2) identifies:

Since the imperial examinations were abolished in 1905, the emphasis in China has swung sharply away from the Confucian classics, and from literature and philosophy in general. After 1949, education was slanted heavily towards science as China strove to catch up with the rest of the world....

However, as a means of testing knowledge, examinations still exist and, by controlling progress through the educational system, they still control access to professional careers. The founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 marked a turning point in China's history, but not in the history of the examination system. It was impossible for the imperial examination system, which had lasted for more than sixteen centuries, not to leave some imprint on people's minds. As a result, the Chinese people still cherish a wholehearted, almost slavish attitude towards examinations, which often lays too much emphasis on mechanical memorisation (Su 1998:38).

Chan (1996) provides more detailed description of the influence of China's Imperial examination system on today's education. According to Chan (1996:95-96), education in ancient China placed great emphasis on examinations in the selection of mandarian officials for public service. The *keju* examination, held every three years, aimed to find, from across the whole nation, the top scholar, *zhuangyuan*, the second-place scholar, *bangyan*, and the third-place scholar, *tanhua*. The system was greatly valued by the public, since it was an open competition between males, and success in the examinations led to status and wealth and even, in ancient times to marriage with a princess. The examination papers were set primarily to test the candidates' ability to recite classical works, although their poetic composition was also tested. However, creative thinking, concept formation, information processing, and decision-making abilities were not given prominent attention. The examination system, however, did not only affect status at the higher levels of society. If a person passed the provincial examination, his entire family was raised in status to that of scholar gentry, thereby receiving prestige and privilege. As a Chinese saying indicates "Cocks and dogs will rise to the sky when their owner gets his wish of

passing an exam”. The provincial examination syllabus was largely Confucian in nature and the texts studied for the examination were the Confucian classics. What is more, traditionally, Chinese society has valued scholars more highly than it has members of other occupations.

As a result, the examination-oriented education has continued up to the present day and has dominated schools and universities. Students tend to study only material which will help them to achieve better results in public examinations, and the acquisition of other life skills tends to be neglected. Teachers are forced to cater to the needs of the students, and they often regret that their educational ideals in developing students’ potential are not fostered (e.g. Bond, 1996; Parry & Su, 1998). Such an examination culture reflects the nature of the examinations. According to Lu (2000:6-9), there is a popular saying in Chinese High Schools “Exam, exam, teacher’s magic weapon; scores, scores, student’s lifeblood”. Chinese education has become an education for exams. Under this education system, exams have become the striving target for teaching and studying activities. Students’ intelligence and abilities seem to be judged by their exam scores. With higher scores, students can achieve easier access to colleges and universities and then to better jobs, which indicates a better future.

As can be seen from the above review, while China’s Imperial examination system has been criticised for its influence on Chinese culture and learning, and for the perpetuation of an examination-oriented education system to the present day, there have been significant changes in the examination system which have led, over the centuries, to practical or deeper learning approaches rather than mere memorisation. Early sources suggest that all the reforms dealing with educational and the examination system called for qualified civil officials for government, and all the

methods undergoing developments emphasised in learning leading to understanding and mastery of knowledge. For instance, Fan Zhongyan (989-1052), in his *Memorial* called for the establishment of a national school system through which worthy men could be trained and recruited for the civil service. Fan also asked that in the examinations conducted at the capital for the *jinshi* degree (the highest in the regular system of advancement), more importance be attached to an understanding of the classics and of political problems than to the composition of poetry.

Crozier (2002:6) argues:

Today's university entrance system is an imperfect heir to its imperfect father, the imperial civil service examinations. But it does represent a continuing meritocratic trend in Chinese society with a history unparalleled elsewhere...clearly, the National University Entrance Examinations still emphasize rote learning far too much, but this is increasingly recognised, as is the level of stress that it places on students. [This aspect of learning method] may be improved in the future.

Fan's (2000:7) study suggests that China has changed over the past 20 years and is still changing. So are the nation's cultural values. Economic reforms and the opening of the doors to the West have not only changed the social landscape, but also reshaped the value system.

Thus, while it is acknowledged that China's imperial examination system has had some negative influence on current methods of teaching and learning, it has also been a source of pride within Chinese culture. In the following section, Confucian culture and its developments concerning Chinese traditional beliefs about learning methods will be reviewed in order to throw further light on the development of RL.

2.3.3-4 The influence of traditional Chinese culture on approaches to learning

As indicated in the previous sections, to summarise Confucian beliefs and values is not an easy task, for it reflects complex issues. Modified Confucian values appear today as “neo-Confucian”, “post-Confucian”, and “Confucian heritage” influences on current educational practice (Biggs 1998; Scollon & Wong Scollon 1994). The Confucian tradition itself has been undergoing the effects of development over the last 2500 years. For instance, in 1313 the Mongol court declared one form of Confucian thought, namely the synthesis of Zhu Xi (1130-1200), as the sole basis for the imperial examinations (Garner, 1990:3). The local, provincial, and national examination system, based on the Confucian classics, became more and more powerful in the later Ming and Qing dynasties. But this was not the only story. Along with formal education for the imperial examinations came many other Confucian influences in art, poetry, family life, and local social organisation. Late imperial China was a Confucian culture in the sense that intellectual concerns, moral axioms, education, family rituals, and political ideology all bore the marks of Confucian reflection and action. Confucianism permeated all levels of Chinese life and became a major aspect of a shared Chinese cultural sensibility (Berthrong & Berthrong, 2000:3-4).

Since the purpose here is to review the learning methods of traditional Chinese culture to find sources for the current beliefs about RL strategies, Confucius’ philosophies in other aspects will only be touched on in relation to how and what he taught.

This overview will first examine several of the techniques which Confucius was believed to utilise in his teachings and will then look at the methods of learning which Confucian scholars have seen to be integral to Confucianism.

Beck (2001) compares Confucius' influence in Chinese history with that of Socrates in the West. In his study, Beck summarises Confucius' teaching methods and styles into the following seven aspects (my numbering):

1. Effort in learning
2. Individualised instruction
3. Questions and answers
4. Correct use of language
5. Metaphors and poetry
6. Human examples
7. Cogent sayings

The first one suggests that Confucius encouraged his students to make effort in learning for complete mastery; The second one means that Confucius recognised that students learn in different ways with varying abilities and gave individualised instruction; The third one indicates that in using the conversational style, Confucius would often answer questions put to him by his students, and show his communicative relationship between teacher and students; The fourth one suggests that Confucius asked his students to match their words with their deeds and he believed that honesty was essential for human beings; The fifth one tells that Confucius also explicated the meaning of the texts through using commonplace things as metaphors to describe deep truth; The six one suggests that Confucius used human examples, which he believed, would make students understand his teaching and let students get the insight themselves; The last one shows that Confucius was

famous for his aphoristic sayings, many of which became well-known proverbs of the *Master*. A collection of the sayings or maxims by Confucius and Confucian scholars is preserved in the *Analects*, which will be specially selected and discussed later in this chapter.

Beck's review of the seven aspects of Confucius' teaching methods indicates that Confucius was modest, critical, flexible and practical in his teaching. Confucius' goal was to create gentlemen who would carry themselves with grace, speak correctly, and demonstrate integrity in all things through education.

In his *Memorial to Emperor Renzong* (1050), Cheng Yi (1033-1107) pointed out (cited in De Bary & Bloom, 1999: 600):

In the selection of scholars for the civil service, though there are many categories under which men may qualify, yet there are only one or two persons who may be considered "wise, virtuous, square, and upright." Instead, what the government obtains are scholars who possess no more than erudition and powerful memory. Those who qualify in understanding the classics merely specialise in reciting from memory and do not understand their meaning. They are of little use in government.

Song, Ming, and Qing scholars all stressed the need for a level of commitment to the Confucian way of life that went far beyond the mere ability to read the texts. This was just the first step in the education of a Confucian. The second step was to learn how to make use of the texts. Zhu Xi (1130-1200) whose interpretations of the Confucian classics became the basis of the Imperial examination in 1313, used a range of methods to encourage this deep appreciation of the canon. He developed a whole art of reading, reflecting, and meditating that was aimed at just such a rich discernment of the Confucian way. For instance, he talked about reading the texts as

literally eating them. You had to ingest their meaning via your reading for them to become living texts and not just inanimate words (Berthrong & Berthrong 2000:56). Few learners in China would question the importance, significance and influence of Zhu Xi in the Chinese cultural tradition. No Chinese thinker since Mencius (fourth century B.C.) is better known or has had more influence on Chinese culture—indeed on East Asian culture. Drawing on ideas raised by his predecessors, Zhu developed a systematic metaphysics that dominated the Chinese intellectual world until the early years of the twentieth century.

Fu Guang, a disciple of Zhu Xi, summarised Zhu's approach to reading as follows:

Abide in reverent seriousness and keep to your resolve [to learn].

Make steady progress by following an orderly sequence.

Read carefully and with thoughtful discrimination.

Open your mind-and heart; let the reading sink in.

Make it part of your own experience and self-examination.

Make an all-out effort to apply yourself in [daily] practice.

[Cheng Duanli, "Chengshi richeng" (*CSJC*) 1:7-Db]

Source: De Bary & Bloom (ed. 1999:812-813)

As can be seen, Confucian culture promotes approaches to learning which go well beyond mere memorisation. These approaches can be summarised as:

1. Thoughtful memorisation
2. Repetition and understanding
3. Practice and reviewing
4. Planning and hard working
5. Foundation and consolidation

6. Respecting teachers and independent learning
7. Examination and true learning

Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Thoughtful memorisation

When asked to explain, “Reading carefully and with thoughtful reflection,” Zhu answered: A chapter of the *Analects* consists of no more than a few passages and is easy to learn by heart. Having memorised it, one should reflect upon it quietly at one’s leisure and savour it, thus allowing it to sink into the depths [of one’s mind-and-heart] (De Bary & Bloom 1999:814). Confucian education advocates a strong relationship between studying and reflecting on what one has learnt. “To learn without thinking is unavailing; to think without learning is dangerous” (the *Analects* 2.15, in De Bary & Bloom, 1999:47).

Repetition and understanding

The *Analects* require the student “to learn and at due times to repeat what one has learnt” (the *Analects* 1:1 quoted from Gardner, 1990:99). Learning is reciting, and reciting is learning. The student should understand what he has read in every detail, recite what he has learnt until he is intimately familiar with it.

In this way, those with weak memories naturally will remember and those without the power of comprehension will be able to comprehend (Zhu 10.5a: 7/165:14 in Gardner, 1990:132).

Zhu (10.9a: 9/170:3) explained further:

If we recite it then think it over, think it over then recite it, naturally it will become meaningful to us. If we recite it but don't think it over, we still won't appreciate its meaning. If we think it over but don't recite it, even though we might understand it, our understanding will be precarious (in Gardner, 1990:138). To understand it, you must understand it with certainty (Zhu 8.14a: 1/143:9 in Gardner, 1990:111).

Here appears a thought-provoking marker of the difference between Confucian and Western thinking. To contemporary Western thinking, a learner makes knowledge on their own, engages with it or absorbs it by representing it in a different form to himself/herself or to others. "Simply" repeating a text is seen as a sign that the learner has not really engaged with it or has not fully understood it. If one culture sees learning by memory as a sign of true scholarship, and another sees it as a sign of weakness or even laziness, it is not surprising there are inter-cultural differences in views on RL!

Practising and reviewing

The first line of the *Analects* is "study and practice often". The reviewing of learning is one of the three major principles of Confucian education summarised by Louie (1986), the other two being that the students should have reverence for their teachers,

and the teacher should know the individual characteristics of the students. If a learner practises frequently, he will have a great store of knowledge, but if what is learnt is not reviewed constantly, it will be forgotten. Through review, a student can come to understand the new. (Louie 1986).

Planning and hard working

According to De Bary & Bloom (1999:813), when explaining “applying one’s effort” in his reading method (*Dushufa*), Zhu says: “one should do so according to a definite plan and keep strictly to it”.

Zhu believed there simply were no shortcuts to true understanding (Gardner 1990:21). For example, one should ascertain the proper phonetic reading for each character and then the meaning of each phrase. He felt that it was right to set up a limited curriculum, but exert great effort on it (Zhu 8.7b:5/136:7 in Gardner, 1990:107). In making this effort, students should forget about eating and sleeping and give it their all; in this way they will make a successful start, and from then on they will take pleasure in continuing the effort.

To start and stop, making only half an effort and then giving up, is of no use (Zhu 8.6a:10/134:14, in Gardner, 1990:106).

The effort that the sages and worthies talk about is always of the same type: it is simply to “choose what is good and firmly hold fast to it” (Zhu 8.1b:9/130:5, in Gardner, 1990:99).

The Chinese popular saying “Hanging hair to the beam and pricking awl to the thigh” (*tou xuan liang, zhui ci gu*) is used by teachers or people of any other social

status to describe the ways in which hard working students in ancient time stopped their sleepiness. This saying is based on an ancient story that hard working students who worked far into the night by tying the end of their long hair to the beam of the house or pricking awls to the legs to cause pain in order to stop their sleepiness. This saying is very popular among Chinese people from generation to generation. It does not mean that Chinese learners are advised to physically follow ancient scholars to endure trouble and hardship, but to keep the heritage of hard working virtues of Confucian culture.

Foundation and consolidation

Confucian tradition emphasizes the importance of a solid foundation for learning. If a student is possessed of a solid foundation, subsequent learning can be built upon it. Zhu's (8.14b:3/144:6, in Gardner 1990:112) interpretation of this Confucian culture indicates that, with consolidation of previous knowledge, a learner will be sure to find it easy to understand what he is reading; and in studying, he will be sure to find it easy to remember.

This traditional culture still influences present Chinese learners. Chinese teachers stress the importance of foundational knowledge. They feel that students need to attain mastery of this as a first step in any discipline for effective teaching (Kennedy, 2002).

Respecting teachers and independent learning

As mentioned above, Louie (1986:79) identifies three major principles of Confucian education: students should have reverence for their teachers, lessons should be reviewed, and the teacher should know the individual characteristics of the students. Traditionally, the teacher in Chinese society was held in the highest esteem. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section. However, Confucius also encouraged his students to be independent in learning. As Gardner points out (1990:106), Zhu Xi's view on the method of learning (8.6b:8/135:5 and 8.7a:11/136:2) include the suggestion "Don't depend on teachers or friends", and "In learning, do not claim that there is no one to analyse it for you. You need to go to the core of it yourself, making the most careful effort. You must understand it for yourself". This independence relates to reflective and deep understanding approaches to learning, rather than passively in the response to the content of what is learnt. This view is also reflected in the Chinese proverb, "Teachers open the door, but you must walk through it yourself".

Examination and true learning

Zhu (7.54, in Gardner1990:19) advised:

Scholars must first distinguish between the examinations and studying—which is less important, which is more important.

Unfortunately, what commonly seemed to happen, in Zhu's view, was that students lost the will to pursue true learning as they got caught up in the pursuit of examination success. It was this will that had to be preserved in the face of preparing for the examinations. To Zhu's mind the real problem was simply that students gave

the examinations too much attention; anxious to get ahead, they compromised true Confucian learning by reciting the Confucian classics blindly (Gardner1990).

Zhu Xi's recommendations for reading, as codified by his followers and known as his reading method (*dushufa*), spread with his other teachings and the publication of his books throughout East Asia. Modern historians of Chinese thought and education have acknowledged the wide influence of his study and reading methods (De Bary & Bloom, 1990:812). And yet, even when he was encouraging students to exert thoughtful memorisation and deep learning, he was lamenting students' unthinking, mechanical approach to learning due to the pressure of examination-oriented education system.

Even though, the influence of this traditional Chinese culture has continued up to the present day as discussed in the previous section (see 2.3.2-3), in historical perspective, the development of Confucian methods of learning suggests a combination of deep understanding and meaningful-oriented memorisation. These influences have continued to the present day. For instance, Tang (1991) has studied deep-oriented Hong Kong students who use deep-memorising strategies to cope with examination requirements, combining memorisation with meaningful reflection.

It might be concluded from this overview that learning approaches reflecting Confucian education emphasise making a deliberate effort to understand the meaning of texts, rather than emphasising meaningless repetition. The purpose of using RL in this context is to ensure accurate recall in order, as Biggs puts it (1997: 3) "to get the big picture". RL, therefore, is seen in Confucian culture as a way of consolidation of knowledge and a deepening of understanding.

2.3.3-4.1 A brief concluding summary

Two main impressions emerge from the literature review and discussion in this section. First, the shape of learning methods in China is the result of both continuity and development in the Confucian tradition over several thousand years. This is a unique and special culture.

Here is the irony of the fact that, while Zhu's writings emphasised deep learning, the pressure of examinations led students to learn these writings without thinking or deep learning. As the principles embedded in the teaching of Confucius and his followers may have become distorted over the centuries, by the requirements of the Imperial examination, Confucius' original educational principles should be investigated and resumed in historical perspective.

As Leung (1996:248) states, in Chinese culture, a great variety of traditional beliefs is readily identifiable in the classical literature and in proverbs from the daily vernacular. Confucius' sayings and maxims about learning and education in China mostly from *Analects*, will be discussed in the next section, for the purpose of shedding some light on the principles Confucius advocated and how they characterise Chinese EFL learners.

2.3.3-5 A close look at the cultural features of Chinese EFL learners through Confucius' sayings and maxims

In recent years the study of the history of Chinese philosophy, ranging from Confucius to the modern time, has been in full swing. Besides many dictionaries of proverbs or maxims, the Internet provides a useful source of information on

Confucian cultural values. Confucius' sayings and maxims discussed in this section are selected both from these sources and from the *Analects*.

According to De Bary & Bloom (1999:42), the *Analects* is the single most important source for understanding the thought of Confucius and the traditions to which he subscribed. It is clearly, however, not a work that he himself wrote. The Greek word *analects* means "a selection," while the Chinese title *Luyu* may be translated as "conversations." This selection of conversations was compiled by later followers, themselves apparently representing different points of view.

Confucius left many wise sayings and maxims in ancient China that helped many people learn about nature, the world, and human behaviour, and which continue to stir learners' minds and spur them forward.

For this reason, the *Analects* is an important source for understanding the influence of Confucian education on current learning methods.

Importance of learning and high motivation

As a well-known Chinese proverb goes: "When planning for a year, plant corn, when planning for a decade, plant trees. When planning for a life, train and educate people." It was believed in ancient China that intelligence must be built on a foundation and could not develop from a vacuum, and thus it was believed that "People can only know through learning and are not born with knowledge" ...and people should "have an insatiable desire to learn" (Chan 1996:94).

Many of Confucius' sayings and maxims reflect the encouragement of learning, as can be seen from the following example:

Life is limited, while learning is limitless.

Source: Chen (1990:178) (author translation)

It can not be a good jade without being carved.

People can not be knowledgeable without learning.

Source: Chen (1990:163) (author translation)

It is always useful to open a book.

Source: Rao (1996:460)

The worth of other pursuits is small; the study of books excels them all.

Source: Wu (1998:40)

When the time comes to use your knowledge, you will regret how little you have read.

Source: Rao (1996:460)

Learn, and then you will find your learning inadequate.

Source: Bond (1996:499)

Traditional Chinese cultural values relating to education have influenced parent, student and teacher goals and approaches in ways which seem to cultivate a high achievement motive and strategies for learning (Gow, *et al*, 1996:111-112).

Since education has a high status among traditional Chinese values, children are taught that all jobs are low in status, except study, which is the highest. Education is believed to be important, not so much as a ladder up the social hierarchy, but as training towards the better development of the whole person (Ho 1981; Mordkowitz and Ginsburg 1987). As an old Chinese proverb puts it: "In books there are golden

houses and beautiful girls”. What it means is that one obtains knowledge, and all the good things in life will follow.

Parents showed their love by providing the best possible opportunities for learning, while children tried to return love by doing their best in school. The children’s academic striving is driven by the recognition of the sacrifices made by their parents. The strong emphasis on education makes Chinese students believe that academic study is a central and important task to be accomplished. They work hard and generally attribute their academic performance more to their effort than to ability (Hau and Salili, 1990; 1991). They learn as much as they can in school so as to fulfil their duties towards their parents. Thus, Chinese students’ strong achievement orientation partly reflects the value of education in the culture.

As can be seen from the above review, the Confucian reverence for learners and learning has been being embedded in everyday life and social values. Further traditional Chinese cultural values relating to teachers and the way of learning will be reviewed below:

Respecting teachers and learning with interaction

Confucius identified three obligations as the basic requirements of a good teacher:

Being the model for people to follow,
Passing on knowledge and
Showing the students through the door.

Source: Rao (1996:461)

A good teacher should be the guide to the correct way to study and investigate. Therefore there is a saying among Chinese people to show their respect to teachers. "A one day's teacher, a father in life". It means that someone being your teacher, even for only one day, should be respected as your father in your life. Thus, it could be expected that Chinese students would take their teachers' words as golden principles which could not be challenged (Siu 1992, quoted from Gow, *et al.*, 1996:114). The Chinese theory of learning assumes that people are innately capable of learning from models. Confucian culture considered human nature as white silk and described like this: It will become green if dyed in dark green, and yellow if dyed yellow. When the dye is changed it will change accordingly (Bond, 1996). Another well-known parable is that of the mother of the philosopher Mencius (Meng Zi), who changed her residence three times in order to ensure that her son was living with good neighbours (Stevenson & Lee, 1996).

Confucian culture for believing about the role of teacher as model has continued to the present day. A popular belief about the relationship between a teacher and a student in China is "a jug of water and a bowl of water". This is the high expectation of teacher knowledge. It is said that a teacher should have a large jug of water if he intends to give students a small bowl of water. Thus, it is not surprising to see so many refresher courses in China, which are especially established for teachers, not only to improve their teaching skills but more importantly to let themselves refresh their academic knowledge.

Williams & Burden (1997:58) refer to the relationship between a teacher and a student in the West as "the jugs and mugs" theory. They state:

The teacher is seen as having a large jug of knowledge which is poured into learner “mugs” or receptacles, which in turn can only accept a certain amount of that knowledge according to their efforts, i.e. hard work.

This statement seems coincidentally to have reflected Confucian culture about teachers’ authority and students’ diligent work.

However, the relationship between teacher and student does not mean merely a teacher-based relationship. Confucius taught learners to be polite while at the same time giving them a degree of independence in learning. To be a good teacher, Confucius believed that one had to continually be a good student. Thus one of his most important methods of teaching was to be an attentive listener in order to learn from students how to teach them:

To listen silently, to learn untiringly, and to teach others without being wearied—that is just natural with me.

Source: Chen (1990:170) (author translation)

Although most of Confucius’ teaching was through the conversational style, it is said that he once expressed the wish not to speak. One of his disciples immediately objected. They expected their teacher always to be talking to them so that they could pass on his teachings. Confucius used the situation to call their attention to the silent teachings of Nature. “Does Heaven speak? Yet the four seasons run their course and all creatures are born according to it. Does Heaven speak?” Maclin (2000) explains this Confucius’ teaching as below:

Perhaps he was pointing out that the greatest teacher would still remain after he was gone. If faculty are to teach in order to affect eternity, they must learn

to influence students by having high expectations for all students, modelling the learning and attitudes they want to see in students, seeking ways to find and encourage the potential of each student, and encouraging students to take charge of their learning, thus becoming more responsible and accountable for their own achievements (Maclin, 2000:1).

For the researcher, Confucius just encouraged students to make the effort to learn by allowing them room to think for themselves. There seems to be an indication of teaching and learning methods in which Confucius encouraged students to develop their own opinion on things. The following sayings reflect Confucius' emphasis on using independent and flexible learning skills:

Give a man a fish and he eats for a day.

Teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime.

Source: Wenden (1991:1)

He who depends on himself will attain the greatest happiness.

Source: Pei (1995-2003, page unnumbered)

The sayings above indicate that learners should not rely heavily on teachers, but on themselves. There are also sayings which suggest active and interactive approaches to learning:

Be of an active nature and fond of learning.

Be humble and do not hesitate to ask those who may be lesser than you are.

Source: Chen (1990:176) (author translation)

Confucius' sayings indicate the attitude that learners should take: Humanism and faithfulness underpin the co-operative nature of human relationships and, by extension, of learning relationships. Propriety, which concerns the outward manifestation of humanism and faithfulness through proper social behaviour, embodies the concepts of "face" and self-effacement (Flowerdew 1998:32) which have a significant effect on the learning methods of group work (reviewed later in 2.3.3-6).

Kennedy (2002:433) describes some of the more recent reinterpretations of Confucian values as "Confucian confusions":

The "Confucian values" of collectivism and conformity are often stressed in the research literature on "Chinese Learners". However, as Lee (1996:34) says, this is only part of the story; Confucius also had much to say about individuality in learning. Education is only meaningful if it leads to the perfection of the self: "the purpose of learning is to cultivate oneself as an intelligent, creative, independent, autonomous being". Cheng (2000:441) concurs, pointing out that the Chinese term "knowledge" is made up of two characters: "One is xue" (to learn) and the other is "wen" (to ask). This means that the action of enquiring and questioning is central to the quest for knowledge.

The above review suggests a flexibility in the interactive nature of relationships between teachers and students, or among students, since the time of ancient China. This offers a challenge to common beliefs about passive RL based on Confucian unequal human relationships.

Learning and understanding

Confucius emphasised the importance of learning and at the same time advocated an active learning role rather than a passive one. According to Confucius, learning and thinking are both indispensable:

Learning without thought brings ensnarement.

Thought without learning totters.

Source: Rao (1996:460)

Confucius' sayings and maxims lay stress on using one's mind in the process of learning, in order to gain a thorough understanding, rather than passively receiving knowledge. Whether Chinese EFL learners are passive rote learners who are using a surface approach, or active learners using RL to enhance deep-learning, has been the point at issue for many years.

While there is ample anecdotal evidence which paints a stereotypical picture of passive Chinese learners relying heavily on RL and having a non-critical and non-analytical approach to the information learnt (Gow, *et al.*, 1996), these widely held Western stereotypes of Chinese learners are shown to be largely without strong evidence. On the contrary, there is evidence to indicate that Chinese learners are achievement-oriented and academically successful, and that their success is based on memorisation and a deepening of understanding. For example, Rao (1998:136) writes:

Actually, I was encouraged to learn English in context, since my teacher often gave us background information and asked us to learn more about it, but if I had not memorised anything it was impossible for me to understand.

Practising and hard working

Confucius believed in using repetition, practice and reviewing to strengthen knowledge. To those ends, diligence is always believed to be the main feature of Chinese learners, but Confucius saw this diligence as bringing its own rewards:

In learning and straightway practising is there not pleasure also?

Source: Pei (1995-2003, page unnumbered)

This saying indicates the relationship between learning and practising, and refers to strategies which contribute to the storage and retrieval of language. As discussed in the first chapter (see 1.1.1-2), practice involves strategies such as repetition, rehearsal, experimentation, application of rules, imitation, and attention to detail, while focusing on accuracy of usage. Chinese people believe that “practice, practice, practice makes perfect”. Although this is also a common saying in the West, there might be different conceptions between the West and the East. While in the West, this saying might be used by teachers to encourage learners to do their course tasks productively, Eastern CHC conception of this saying is related to repetition of learnt knowledge, which involves a lot of exercises for a consolidation of already learnt knowledge and reaching a quick, skillful means to answer exam questions accurately. Furthermore, CHC learners themselves are likely to embrace and follow this principle of their own accord, for which they will get pleasure from their hard work.

Reviewing, which is also closely linked with practice, is also reflected in one of Confucius’ famous sayings:

By reviewing the old, one learns the new.

Source: Rao (1996:461)

Thus Confucianism sees reviewing as valuable not only for consolidation of knowledge, but also as the basis of further learning. This seems consistent with Oxford's (1990) structured reviewing (the definition of which has been provided in Chapter One, see 1.1.1-2 (4)). Further, reviewing is taken as an activity that is used to encourage individuals to reflect, describe, analyse and communicate what they have recently experienced (Greenaway 2000).

The Chinese word “memorisation” (*beishu*), translated literally, means “to recite the book from memory”, and literal recitation is a very common practice. Recitation is considered one of the most effective ways for reviewing. By reciting what the learner has just learnt, there emerges a consolidation of knowledge and deepening of understanding about what has been learned. An old Chinese saying goes: “When a learner memorise 300 *Tang* poems, he is sure to be able to compose poems of his own even though he is not a poet”.

Confucius' principles on practising and reviewing had a significant influence on the behaviour of Chinese learners in terms of hard work. Some favourite Chinese sayings listed below indicate the importance of diligence and manners:

Genius comes from hard work and knowledge depends on accumulation.

Source: Leung (1996:252)

Diligence is a boat in the vast ocean of learning, studying is a way to infinite knowledge.

Source: Chen (1990:179) (author translation)

With diligence you can grind an iron bar into a needle.

Source: Biggs (1999:2)

These sayings indicate the Confucian view that success in learning depend upon effort rather than ability.

However, the predominant belief in the West is that great ability will bring success, and that failure is the result of poor ability. The CHCs belief is that effort will bring success, and that failure comes when not enough effort has been put in. CHC learners could attribute their failure, not to their inappropriate beliefs, nor to their ineffective strategies, but to their lack of effort (Gu & Johnson 1996:666). Because they believe in effortful study, there is less risk for CHC learners of learned helplessness and apathy in the face of failure (Salili 1996).

In EFL learning, Chinese students are extremely particular about linguistic details. They never feel satisfied until the correct answers are provided (Rao1999). They feel compelled to memorise and will practise until they have committed new information to memory, before they feel comfortable that they have a grasp of it (Lightbown & Spada 1993:115). Therefore it is believed that an English language teacher can expect to find his or her students admirably industrious and often in need of dissuasion from working too hard (Chang 1993:253). Nee (2001) found this to be the case with Chinese students in Singapore, where the use of memorisation and extensive practice and review enabled them to achieve high grades in a highly competitive education system.

Taking the findings above into account, it would be possible to put forward a hypothesis in this study that Confucian-heritage learning culture exerts a particular influence on Chinese EFL learners. This influence leads to the use of RL strategies characterised by particular cultural features which have a positive rather than negative effect on learning. However, it has been suggested by some researchers that

Confucian culture has a negative influence on Chinese learners' and teachers' oral communicative strategies, and this will be reviewed in the following section.

2.3.3-6 Confucian influence on communicative strategies

This section will take a brief look at the seemingly negative influence of Confucian culture on one aspect of EFL learning strategies---communication in class.

As teachers are highly respected in Chinese culture, and are typically regarded as being knowledgeable and authoritative, many researchers indicate that, out of respect, Chinese students are usually not as ready to argue or to voice opinions in class as European students, and are less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviour (Chen, 1990; Leng, 1997). This is seen in Confucian culture as a virtue:

Silence is gold, eloquence is silver.

It is the noisy bird that is easily shot dead.

Don't speak out unless spoken to.

A man should be responsible for his words.

Source: Leng (1997:38)

If you know, to recognise that you know, if you don't know, to realise that you don't know: that is knowledge.

Source: Pei (1995-2003, page unnumbered)

Say yes, when you know; say no when you don't.

Source: Rao (1996:461)

The virtue of remaining silent, combined with the fear of making mistakes and of appearing incompetent or losing "face" in public, often leads Chinese students not to

participate in class discussion, or to keep saying something of which they feel certain than try anything new (Chen 1990).

Confucian-heritage learning culture indicates two seemingly different principles, both active response and careful expression. However, the dual purpose of being an active respondent and a careful speaker in a language class, which seem contradictory, are actually complementary, because in language learning there is need to both *actively inquire* into the language use and to *carefully confirm* the correctness, in order to arrive at better comprehension and communicative ability.

This is confirmed in studies such as that of Ellis, where "...behaviours associated with active inquiry concerning language use (for example, asking the teacher about an expression and asking for confirmation of correctness) were correlated with gains in listening comprehension and communicative ability..." (1995:552).

While this view is recognised as underpinning Western approaches to SL learning, it is less well acknowledged as forming a basis for Confucian-based approaches. However, interaction and collaboration also play an important part in Confucian students' learning. For example, Flowerdew has suggested that group work is wholly consistent with Confucian values as it is based on interpersonal behaviour or *Guanxi* (personal connection or networking), (1998:323-329). In fact, group work is widely used among Chinese students in China, as it is a favoured form of relationship in Chinese culture and underpins much of the in-class and out-of class activity. Flowerdew (1998), using three main principles of Confucianism, namely humanism, faithfulness, and propriety as the mainstay of the three key Confucian values, identifies that:

Humanism and faithfulness, which emphasise empathy and social relationship, underpin the co-operative nature of individuals. Propriety, which

concerns the outward manifestation of humanism and faithfulness through proper social behaviour, embodies the concepts of 'face' and self-effacement (p. 323).

Flowerdew emphasises the value of group work in relation to the Confucian values of "face" and "self-effacement" as below:

In accordance with Confucian tenets, society is hierarchically ordered, with due respect shown for age, seniority, and rank. In this type of interdependent relationship, peers, and especially superiors, must always be accorded 'face' and not caused to lose it through overt and public criticism (p. 325).

The concept of self-effacement also stems from the Confucian principle of propriety, which requires that individuals maintain a certain level of humility in accordance with the rank, and do not elevate themselves above others (p. 326).

Flowerdew argued that group work founded on harmonious discussion is sensitive to the three key Confucian values: co-operation, "face", and self-effacement, from which collaborative learning strategies are fostered and a non-stressful learning environment for the students is created.

2.3.3-7 The continuing benefit of Confucian-based culture

While it is clear that Confucian culture does have a major impact on the social practices and structures of Chinese society, the researcher has argued here that it may be inappropriate to attribute all the limitations of learning strategies, such as passive RL, to Confucius. Furthermore, such negative views may prevent Western

researchers from appreciating Confucian-based cultural values. This study provides some positive perspectives on Confucian-based Chinese culture to complement the work of those researchers (e.g. Geenius 2000) whose aim is to resurrect the Master's reputation in Chinese history.

In the view of some scholars, Confucius will continue to be revered in the future as China's greatest teacher; Confucian classics will be studied, and Confucian virtues, embodied for countless generations in the familiar sayings and common-sense wisdom of the Chinese people, will remain the cornerstone of ethics. Like flowers floating in the eternal stream of history, they retain their colour and fragrance, as well as their true beauty (Gong, 1994).

Many researchers argue that many Confucian ideas in education should remain valuable. Louie points out that Chairman Mao (1967:209) recognised and embraced the legacy of Confucianism:

Contemporary China has grown out of the past; we are Marxist in our historical approach and must not lop off our history. We should sum up our history from Confucius to Sun Yat-sen and take over this valuable legacy (in Louie 1986:83).

As to the future of Confucianism, Berthrong (2000:22) takes an optimistic view:

“The religious and spiritual dimension of Confucianism continues to infuse the life of East Asian people and is now moving beyond the Pacific Rim to the Americas and Europe”.

It is truly an exciting time to contemplate the cultural capital that the Confucian tradition can contribute to an understanding of students' chosen learning strategies.

2.3.3-8 RL and pedagogical reform

The review of China's historical, cultural and educational background above reveals some practical concern about teaching and learning methods in China. Interestingly, the narrow view of RL as memorisation without proper understanding has been shared by many political leaders in China, with the result that proposals for pedagogical reform in China have frequently been based on criticisms of RL.

Mao Zedong, the first leader of the People's Republic of China (PRC) believed that RL inhibited an understanding of basic concepts, preventing students from applying their learning to real world problems. Mao commented that RL-based learning was similar to "stuffing students like Peking ducks" (Martinsons & Martinsons, 1996:20). Senior leader Deng Xiaoping (who passed away in 1997) used the metaphor of a cat to advocate a variety of learning strategies: "It can be a good cat no matter what colour it is, white or black, if it can catch a mouse".

More recently, President Jiang Zemin identified the tension between academic achievement and personal and social development (reported in the *People's Daily* 02/03/2000):

Some students complain about the heavy workload and too many home assignments and they are enduring enormous pressure to perform well at school. While focusing on the academic attainments of students, Jiang added, quite a number of schools do not attach due importance to developing and cultivating the students as individuals.

However, RL remains. Societal and political ideology has combined to impede changes in approaches (Martinsons & Martinsons, 1996; Nee, 2001). Standing in the

way of change is a centuries-old mindset among parents and teachers who define a good student as an unquestioning, hard-working learner with top exam grades. Nevertheless, rapid social change in China, brought about by its increasing involvement in the international market place is leading to a further questioning of traditional approaches to learning.

An article entitled *Broad-based Education Expands Chinese Minds* in the *People's Daily* (28/06/2002) states:

...Three years ago, both the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council said “no” to the traditional spoon-feeding way of education and told schools and parents to attach equal importance to schoolwork, sports, entertainment and psychological health.

More importantly, China is in great need of people with all-round abilities as it opens more widely to the world and starts to adopt many internationally accepted practices. This has brought drastic changes to the Chinese value systems and way of life. Some say it has triggered another revolution in China.

This review of pedagogical reform in China reveals that the repeated calls for this reform may have been based, like the criticisms from the West, on a misunderstanding of the Confucian principles on which CHC learners' use of RL is based.

2.3.3-9 Summary

This review of the impact of traditional beliefs on Chinese students' learning strategies has suggested that there is a need to clarify the Confucian-based culture in

relation to the unique characteristics of RL, in order to prevent further confusion from the West world.

While some research (see, for example, Bond 1996) has explored the features (such as motivation and behaviour) of Chinese EFL learners as its explanatory framework, and RL has been identified as a combination of memorising and understanding, a coherent analysis of the impact of Confucianism on Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the use of RL in vocabulary learning has yet to be completed. This omission needs to be rectified, to identify the value of Chinese heritage culture in EFL learning. Based on previous research on the features of Chinese EFL learners, it could be said that the term RL is currently used in the literature without a full consideration of different cultural beliefs.

The review of the literature also suggests that there are some pedagogical approaches used in an educational environment grounded in Confucian precepts for teaching and learning and educational roles and responsibilities. It suggests that many of the limitations on Chinese students' learning of English stem from a traditional teacher-centred classroom and the use of rote-memory strategies, but that these pedagogical approaches may not actually reflect authentic Confucian learning strategies. This will be given further consideration in the course of this study.

China is a country which provides a uniquely favorable setting, for a study of learners' beliefs about the role of RL in EFL vocabulary learning, particularly in mainland China, where traditional approaches to learning have been relatively unaffected by Western principles (but see the discussion of the influx of Western teachers and ideas in 2.3.1-2). The present study aims to explore the explicit beliefs of Chinese EFL learners who were born and grew up in mainland China, under the full influence of Confucian culture (except the period of the Cultural Revolution), in

contrast with many studies about cultural features of Chinese learners which are based in Hong Kong or elsewhere in the world.

RL as a memorisation technique or a way of consolidating the meaning of words should not be neglected or negated if it is beneficial for learning. The Chinese have a saying: “Letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend”. That was also a policy set forth by Mao, the late Chinese chairman, for promoting the progress of the arts, the sciences and the development of a flourishing traditional and socialist culture. Maybe it is time for us to become applied linguistic gardeners and to protect each plant if it is alive. As Cotterall states (1999:493): “Learners approach the task of learning another language in different ways, according to various individual characteristics. One of these characteristics is the belief they hold about language learning”. This study will explore Chinese learners’ beliefs about EFL learning, and consider whether the cultural basis for these beliefs leads them to see RL in a different light from those who view it as nothing more than mindless memorisation.

2.4 Hypothesis

Based on the relevant literature reviewed above, the hypotheses are set out below:

The main hypothesis is that Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies are preferable to other memory strategies for learning and memorising vocabulary. They hold positive beliefs about RL, because they consider RL strategies to be consistent with traditional Chinese culture and values. This hypothesis is subdivided into six sections:

- 1) Chinese EFL learners state that they prefer RL strategies to other memory strategies and that they use more RL strategies than other memory strategies;
- 2) Chinese EFL learners believe that RL works better for memorising vocabulary than other strategies;
- 3) Those who believe in the effectiveness of RL perform better in vocabulary tests than those who do not.
- 4) Chinese EFL learners believe that RL is effective both in the initial stages and the higher stages of language learning;
- 5) Chinese EFL learners believe that RL conveys the basic knowledge to develop other memory strategies;
- 6) RL is believed to be of Confucian cultural value in China.

Whether the research findings support those hypotheses or not will rest on the research investigation, the result of which will be discussed in Chapter 4-statement of results and Chapter 5---Data analysis. The next chapter presents a discussion of the methodology employed in this investigation.

CHAPTER THREE

THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This chapter is concerned with the methodology employed to carry out the study. A detailed account of the subjects and settings is provided and the design of the instruments, procedures of data collection including the methods of data analysis are also provided. A theoretical consideration of fieldwork methodology is also addressed wherever appropriate.

3.1 Method

3.1.1 What this study is about

This study focuses on an analysis of mainland Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the role of rote learning (RL) in English vocabulary learning.

The research aims, questions and hypothesis have already been presented in Chapter One, Introduction (see 1.2, 1.3) and Chapter Two (see 2.4). For the sake of highlighting the selected research methods, the research questions and the hypothesis are presented here again.

This research attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Do Chinese EFL learners believe that they prefer RL and use more RL strategies than other memory strategies?
2. Do Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies work better or worse than other strategies?

3. Is there any relationship between beliefs about RL and learners' achievement in the English vocabulary test?
4. Do Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies are helpful in all stages of EFL vocabulary learning?
5. What do Chinese EFL learners believe is the relationship between RL and other memory strategies?
6. Do Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies reflect traditional Chinese culture and values?

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- 1) Chinese EFL learners state that they prefer RL strategies to other memory strategies and use more RL strategies than other memory strategies;
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- 3) Those who believe in the effectiveness of RL perform better in vocabulary tests than those who do not.
- 4) Chinese EFL learners believe that RL is effective both in the initial stages and the higher stages of language learning;
- 5) Chinese EFL learners believe that RL conveys the basic knowledge to develop other memory strategies;

6) RL is believed to be of Confucian cultural value in China.

The following subsection presents who the subjects were and how they were selected.

3.1.2 Subjects and settings

3.1.2-1 Subjects

100 subjects out of 150 English majors in the English Department at a large University in the Northeast area of China, who were willing to participate in the study were selected as the subjects for the researcher to test the research hypothesis.

3.1.2-2 Selection

It should be noted first that this section only describes the subjects for the full study, leaving the pilot subjects later to 3.4.5-1. The subjects were restricted to 100 students and 50 EFL Chinese teachers.

In order to test the importance of RL at both initial and higher stages of language learning, 25 subjects were chosen from each of the 4 stages or grades, each stage representing one year of language study. Each group of 25 students out of each of the 4 stages were selected by the head and teachers of the department based on the subjects' available time to participate in this study. Initially, 30 subjects were selected for interviews as representatives from the same 100 subjects used for the questionnaire and the tests. However, more subjects were eager to participate in the interviews, and this coincided with the researcher's desire for more *verbal reports*. As a result, all 100 subjects eventually took part in the interviews.

It was originally intended to choose an equal number of male and female learners. This proved to be impossible due to the limited number of male learners in the department. A total of 150 English majors formed 4 stages in the English department. There were 2 classes in Stage 1 with 30 students each and 1 class in each of the rest of the stages, again with 30 students in each class. The total number of male students was only 40 in the whole department. In this study, of all the 100 participants, there were 76 females and only 24 males. This is a reflection of the gender balance in the course overall—i.e. 1 male to every 3 females. This imbalance clearly has implications for data analysis in relation to gender, and this is taken into account in the discussion of findings (see Chapter 4, 4.3.3).

In addition to the student participants, the researcher distributed questionnaires to 50 EFL teachers in 3 different regions of mainland China, in order to establish the generalisability of the study's findings.

3.1.2-3 Students' background

All the students in the study were on a BA degree course in the English Department, at Shenyang University of Technology, China. This means that only English majors participated in this study. The reason was very simple, it was just the researcher's convenience in the English Department of that chosen university to collect the data.

As all the subjects in this study gained a similar teaching and learning experience, the researcher need not introduce too many variables into this study.

The students all shared similar background experience in relation to the following factors:

- a) They were all four-year-degree course students, between the ages of 19 and 22, (the average age was 20.5). Thus, they were young people who were born during the years of 1978 to 1981. That was exactly the time when the “Open Door” policy was started in China. This indicated that they enjoyed a considerably changed social situation in China after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) as described in Chapter 2 (See 2.3.1-2), having richer and more varied learning materials and more creative learning environments than would previously have been available to them.
- b) The number of years they spent learning English, ranging from 7 to 10, was 8.5 on average. As a minimum, they had all learnt English for 6 years, three years in middle schools and three years in high schools before entering the university. They all shared the common experience of these 6 years of English learning. Thus, they came to university with previous learning experiences and had already developed specific learning strategies. Therefore, they already had a good command of the basic structures of English and were increasing their range of vocabulary, and gaining more knowledge of English, leading to the degree in 4 years. In order to enhance their employment prospects, the students all took part in the graded state Test for English Majors (TEM), taking Grade 4 (TEM-4) at the end of the 2nd stage, and Grade 8 (TEM-8) at the end of the 4th stage, although the state grade examinations were not a part of their degree course and the results did not affect their obtaining of the degree. TEM in China has been in official operation for more than a decade. It is organised by the English Group of the National Higher Education Foreign Language Major Teaching Supervisory Committee of the state Education Ministry. The scores are widely used and frequently interpreted by associated parties or score users for academic or

occupational purposes. TEM has two levels of testing; one is designed for 2nd year university students at the foundation stage and the other for the advanced stage. TEM-4 is conducted with time limit of 145 minutes, consisting of 6 parts: writing; dictation; listening comprehension; cloze; grammar & vocabulary; reading comprehension. TEM-8 is conducted with time limit of 95 minutes, consisting of 3 parts: listening comprehension; proofreading & error correction; reading comprehension. TEM is voluntary-based; however, the students all actively try to see their level of EFL knowledge achievements. Thus, they were highly motivated to learn more, and to reach specific goals.

- c) None of them had ever been to an English-speaking country. They had never even been abroad. Thus, English was dealt with totally as EFL. They were “pure” Chinese learners of English who were born and were growing up in China. Their ways of learning English had therefore been influenced by Confucian heritage culture more directly, or more uninterruptedly, than those who had studied in Western countries.
- d) They felt lucky to pass the university entrance examination. Taking China’s outward orientation into consideration, they took pride in choosing to specialise in English language learning at university, seeing this as both a valuable skill and a step towards higher social status in today’s outward-looking China. With this as a stimulus in mind, it was not unusual to see hard working students with serious attitudes towards exams.
- e) They were all native Chinese speakers, which meant that Chinese as their mother tongue was predominantly used in daily life. Thus, their ways of learning Chinese, particularly written language greatly influenced their methods of dealing with EFL issues.

3.1.2-4 Teachers' background

It is important to note that the subjects of the study were 100 EFL students in one higher education institution as mentioned above and 42 EFL teachers in different parts of China such as Guangzhou, Nanjing and Shanghai. (For further details, see Section 3.4.2). Fifty teacher subjects were expected to participate in the research study. However, while 50 questionnaires were distributed, only 42 replied. Thus, the number of teacher subjects in this study was counted as 42. For the purpose of generalisability of the research findings (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.10 for detailed discussion) the 42 teacher subjects, who were considered to be advanced EFL learners answered a brief questionnaire regarding the beliefs about RL with CHCs obtained from the student subjects.

As advanced EFL learners, they all shared similar backgrounds to the student subjects. That is, they had the same native language, the same CHCs, the same length of EFL learning experience before entering university for a teacher training course. They were all professional and experienced teachers, having been strictly selected from all over China, with intermediate or senior professional titles. They were highly motivated under the systems of selection, training, promotion and reward at their work places.

3.2 Instruments: theoretical consideration of fieldwork methodology

A number of field procedures have been used for collecting information for language learning research, such as questionnaires, interviews, tests, observations, think-aloud, and diary use (e.g. Daly 1997; Drever 1995; Gu & Johnson 1996; Harrison 1983;

Horwitz 1987; Nunan 1992; Naiman 1996; Nakamura 2000; Oxford 1990; Read 1997; Sakui & Gaies 1999; Seliger & Shohamy 1989; Swetman 1997; Wenden 1987).

Guided by the theoretical consideration of fieldwork methodology, three instruments—questionnaire, test and interview—were chosen and employed for the present study, the advantages and disadvantages of which will be discussed below:

3.2.1 Questionnaires

Nunan (1992:231) points out: “A questionnaire is an instrument for the collection of data, usually in written form, consisting of open and /or closed questions and other probes requiring a response from subjects.” Dörnyei (2002:6) also defines a questionnaire as “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers.” In this study, questionnaires were distributed both to EFL students and to EFL teachers (see Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2).

3.2.1-1 Advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires

There are many reasons to believe that the use of various types of questionnaires is a very popular data collection technique. Many studies on the use of questionnaires provide lists of advantages, particularly in comparison with structured interviews (e.g. Babbie 1998; Bryman 2001; Dörnyei 2002; Seliger & Shohamy 1989). Taken together, the advantages of questionnaires can be identified as follows:

- a) Financial resources, which lead to economy: questionnaires are cheaper to administer than interviews. They are self-administered and can be sent out in one batch.
- b) Researcher time: questionnaires are quicker to administer than interviews. The questionnaires can be sent out through the mail or distributed to large groups of subjects at the same time.
- c) Researcher effort: questionnaires provide easier ways to collate and analyse data than interviews. In particular, closed questions, in which the respondent is asked to select an answer from among a list provided by the researcher, are very popular because they provide a greater uniformity of responses and are more easily processed for statistical analysis than open-ended questions. Open-ended responses, in which the respondent is asked to provide his or her own answer to the question, must be coded before they can be processed for computer process (Babbie1998).

Although many researchers believe that questionnaires are especially valuable because they are efficient, they also examine the major drawbacks of questionnaires. They may cause some difficulties for data collection and analysis such as:

- a) There is no guarantee that the questionnaires which have been sent out will be returned. Security and reliability may be hard to ensure.
- b) Additional data cannot be collected as from interviews. The researcher cannot prompt, probe or ask more questions in relation to the respondents' individual beliefs.

- c) The effect of fatigue caused by a too long questionnaire may affect the research results.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, however, it is possible to develop the advantages and get over the disadvantages of questionnaires. To this, the suggestions offered by Bryman (2001:129) might be useful to list here for questionnaire design consideration:

- Have few open questions, since closed ones tend to be easier to answer (though possibly superficial picture);
- Have easy-to-follow designs to minimize the risk that the respondent will fail to follow filter questions or will inadvertently omit a question;
- Be shorter, to reduce the risk of ‘respondent fatigue’, since it is manifestly easier for a respondent who becomes tired of answering questions in a long questionnaire to consign it to a waste paper bin than it is for a respondent to terminate an interview.

The questionnaires used in this study (one for EFL students and one for EFL teachers) were not based on any single theory but designed by considering the need and importance of an instrument for serving the purpose of the present research, although with previous studies in mind as valuable reference. To gain a picture of Chinese EFL learners’ beliefs about RL in general, it was decided to use interviews to complement the questionnaire data (see the following section) and EFL teachers’ questionnaires to provide necessary data generalisability (see Section 3.4.2).

3.2.2 Interviews

At the simplest level, interviews can be described as “the elicitation of data by one person from another through person-to-person encounters” (Nunan 1992:231). The most common forms of interviewing involve individual, face-to-face verbal interchange, face-to-face group interchange or telephone surveys. Rather than asking respondents to read questionnaires and enter their own answers, interviewers ask the questions orally and record respondents’ answers (Babbie 1998). In this study, those 100 EFL students who answered questionnaires were also interviewed individually in a face-to-face encounter.

Various types of interviews have been identified and differentiated by their degree of explicitness and structure, ranging from very open interviews to very structured ones as described by Seliger & Shohamy (1989:167):

“Open/unstructured” interviews provide the interviewee with broad freedom of expression and elaboration and often resemble informal talks. They allow greater depth, and one question leads to another without a pre-planned agenda of what will be asked.

In “semi-open” interviews there are specific core questions determined in advance from which the interviewer branches off to explore in-depth information, probing according to the way the interview proceeds, and allowing elaboration, within limits.

The “semi-structured” interview consists of specific and defined questions determined beforehand, but at the same time it allows some elaboration in the questions and answers.

The “structured” interview consists of questions and answers defined from the start and presented to the interviewee. No elaboration is allowed in either the questions or the answers.

Naturally, all those forms of interviews are of great importance for collecting data. One of the popular data collection techniques, semi-structured interview, will be focused on in this study, as in many studies on language learning strategies, semi-structured interviews are used to elicit information (e.g. Daly 1997; Nakamura 2000). Drever (1995: 1-13) also explains, the term “semi-structured” interview means that the interviewer sets up a general structure by deciding in advance what ground is to be covered and what main questions are to be asked. This leaves the detailed structure to be worked out during the interview. The person interviewed can answer at some length in his or her own words, and the interviewer responds using prompts, probes and follow-up questions to get the interviewee to clarify or expand on the answers. Semi-structured interviews are likely to have a mixture of closed and open questions. Prompts are often open and the probes usually close down the focus. This means that prompts invite different answers of the same kind, probes ask for an answer to be developed. In this sense, prompts are used to encourage broad coverage and probes aim at exploring responses in depth.

3.2.2-1 Advantages and disadvantages of interviews

What, then, can interviews do for data collection? They can make the following things happen:

- a) The researcher can expect the interviewees to treat the questions more seriously than in questionnaires.
- b) There is less opportunity in interviews than in questionnaires for the respondents inadvertently to omit something.
- c) Any ambiguities or misunderstandings of the questions can be clarified (e.g. respondents' first language can be used to interpret the meanings).
- d) Interviewing is a method of collecting data that can stand on its own or be a follow-up to another method (Swetnam 1997:53). For example, interviews may offer insights that help researchers to interpret responses to questionnaires.
- e) It is flexible in the sense that the interviewer may change the questions if necessary. The interviewees also have a right to change the question or focus themselves.
- f) During the interview, both the researcher and the respondents have the opportunity to ask for further information and go into in-depth understanding of both the researcher's and the research participants' perspectives or experiences.

Interviewing suggests its advantages as discussed above, on the other hand, it may also suffer from the following problems:

- It is prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of both the interviewer and the interviewee: the interviewee may respond in a certain way to please the interviewer (Seliger & Shohamy 1989:166), either as a result of unequal power relations between interviewer and interviewee or because a strong

rapport between the two leads to a genuine desire on the part of the interviewee to be “helpful.”

- The recordings of interviews can be affected by some environments such as ringing telephones, uncomfortable tables, chairs and noise outside the room.
- Interviews can be costly, time-consuming, and often more difficult to administer (Seliger & Shohamy 1989:166) than questionnaires.
- Feelings may also affect interviews. Nervousness on the part of both interviewer and interviewee may affect the results of interview.

3.2.2-2 Interviews and questionnaires complement each other

There is no single approach that is universally accepted (Denscombe 2002:2) and a combination of questionnaires and interviews can let the two methods complement each other and enhance the possibility of obtaining both quantitative and qualitative data.

- Interviews are quite similar to open-question questionnaires. A fieldworker may ask questions personally and record the responses. It is easier to elicit open responses in an interview, but the disadvantages are that it is time-consuming and expensive. By contrast, closed-ended questions can provide a greater uniformity of responses and are more easily processed (Babbie 1998:148).
- An interview is a flexible face-to-face conversation. By comparison with interviews, questionnaires are inflexible once the schedules are in print.

Particularly, the researchers will have little control over them once they are sent out.

- Because interviews can provide depth of explanation within a particular context, while questionnaires paint a broad though possibly superficial picture, it is often a good idea to use both (Drever 1995:8), as is the case in this study.

Interviews were used in this study for the purpose of allowing Chinese EFL learners to reveal aspects of their beliefs which were not addressed in the questionnaires and to describe the reasons for their beliefs about RL in china (see Appendix 3 and Section 3.4.3 for further information).

3.2.3 Vocabulary tests

A test is a procedure used to collect data on subjects' ability or knowledge of certain disciplines. In second language (SL) acquisition research, tests are generally used to collect data about the subject's ability and knowledge of SL in areas such as vocabulary, grammar, reading, metalinguistic awareness, and general proficiency (Seliger & Shohamy 1989:176).

While some EFL researchers have focused solely on subjects' knowledge and understanding of English vocabulary (e.g. Nurweni & Read 1998, researching Indonesian University students), others have focused on the link between English vocabulary learning strategies and language learning outcomes. For example, Gu & Johnson (1996), correlated Chinese students' replies to a questionnaire with their results on a vocabulary size test and on a university-wide College English Test

(CETBAND2) (which the students had taken at the end of their first year at their university) to investigate how different learning strategies might be related to vocabulary size and general proficiency.

Many researchers have been trying to develop improved ways of measuring vocabulary knowledge from a testing standpoint with awareness of limitations such as lack of contextualisation or lack of reliable indicators of the quality of knowledge (e.g. Nation 1990, Schmitt 2000), and it is suggested that specific tests/instruments should be employed for specific research purposes. Schmitt (2000:164) asserts: “There are several possible purposes for giving a vocabulary test.” He continues (2000:164):

Perhaps the most common one is to find out if students have learned the words that were taught, or that they were expected to learn (*achievement test*). Alternatively, a teacher may want to find where students’ vocabularies have gaps, so that specific attention can be given to those areas (*diagnostic test*). Vocabulary tests can also be used to help place students in the proper class level (*placement test*). Vocabulary items that are part of commercial *proficiency tests*, such as the TOEFL (1998a, 1998b) provide some indication of a learner’s vocabulary size, which is related to overall language proficiency. Other possibilities include utilising tests as a means to motivate students to study, to show students their progress in learning new words, and to make selected words more salient by including them on a test.

Vocabulary testing is believed to be a useful element in a well-run language-teaching program, providing teacher and learner with useful information that can serve each as a basis for improvement (Harrison 1983; Nation 1990; Schmitt 2000). However, the theoretical consideration in this study does not relate to the nature or benefits of the test in teaching and learning, but to its value as a research tool. The

main purpose of using a vocabulary test in this study was to enable the researcher to divide the participants into three groups based on their test scores: (1) those achieving high scores; (2) those on the borderline between high/low scores; and (3) those who achieved low (fail) scores, in order to correlate the responses from questionnaires and interviews to the test results. The researcher did not mean to test vocabulary in isolation, but was seeking to examine the impact of beliefs, as expressed in questionnaires and interviews, on achievement, as measured in the vocabulary test. The test paper design will be discussed in detail later in this chapter (See Section 3.4.4 and Appendix 4).

3.2.4 Ethical issues

To give a more detailed account of the use of instruments, the ethical issues arising from the research should be discussed here.

Following Christians' (2000:138-140) four guidelines in Denzin & Lincoln's (eds) Handbook of Qualitative Research, it was important to take account of codes of ethics when conducting the research.

- a) *Informed consent.* The researcher took voluntary informed consent to be the condition in which participants understood and agreed to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway. The researcher explained clearly to them why their participation was necessary, and how it would be used only for academic purpose. The researcher also recognised the right of any participants to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time.

- b) *Deception*. The securing of participants' voluntary informed consent, before research got underway, was considered the norm for the conduct of research. Throughout the research, there was an attempt to avoid deception or subterfuges. The researcher was honest and open about who she was and what she was doing, and did not rely on misrepresentation or deception as a means of getting the necessary information. The true purpose and aims of the study were revealed before their participation and every attempt was made to ensure that participants had freedom of speech (see Section 3.5 for procedures of data collection). Meanwhile, the researcher was also aware of the data which might be less than 100 per cent truthful. Because of the researcher's frank briefing in advance, it was possible that the subjects might try to please the interviewer by giving answers that they thought the interviewer would want. To get round this, free talk was established after questionnaires and interviews to ensure that participants demonstrated the same views before, during and after their participation.
- c) *Privacy and confidentiality*. The researcher assured the participants of confidentiality. All personal data was secured or concealed and made public only behind a shield of anonymity.
- d) *Accuracy*. The researcher kept in mind that fabrications, fraudulent materials, omissions, and contrivances were both non-scientific and unethical.

The ethical guidelines discussed above directed the researcher's conduct throughout the research.

3.3. Use of the chosen instruments in the context of this study

In the light of considerations discussed above, therefore, questionnaires, interviews and a vocabulary test were employed in the present study because they were seen to be valuable complementary methods of gathering data on Chinese learners' beliefs about what role RL strategies played in learning English vocabulary and on the relationship between those beliefs and measurable achievement. The questionnaire was used to elicit learners' beliefs about the role of RL and of wider memory strategies (MSs) in order to make a taxonomy of the four different groups/categories of MSs for the purpose of analysis. The semi-structured interview set out to elicit more qualitative data, concentrating on the participants' perceptions of RL within Chinese Confucian heritage cultures (CHCs). The test was used to show if the subjects' measurable learning outcomes related to their beliefs about MSs in English vocabulary learning.

It should be noted here that in choosing the research tools/instruments for the present study, the researcher had also reviewed the values of other instruments such as observation, diaries and dialogue journals, and considered them with regard to their advantages and disadvantages. These are discussed in the next section.

3.3.1 Consideration of some options relevant to the specific purpose of study

The literature review suggests various means of research available for gathering information regarding EFL learning strategies. In Cohen's (1998) study, six of research tools are described and discussed: oral interviews and written questionnaires, observation, verbal reports, diaries and dialogue journals, recollective

studies, and computer tracking. To use Cohen's (1998) terms, language learning strategies are generally internal or *mentalist* processes, and because of this, certain research approaches may fail to provide adequate data on learners' strategy use. This study focused on Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the role of RL in vocabulary learning strategies, so efforts were made to elicit learners' **beliefs** about what they do. While a comparison between beliefs and practice might be seen to be valuable, a major challenge in attempting to apply observational techniques to language learners is that many of the learning strategies they use cannot be observed, since they are *mentalist* and not *behavioristic* (Cohen 1998:30). While observational methods can have some advantages such as providing an impartial, objective perspective to the research study, or providing quantifiable data for statistical analysis, observation was not used in this study because it was felt that subjects' use of some MSs would be unobservable. For example, it may be hard to observe a learner retrieving a word by means of applying images.

Other research instruments to collect data were also taken into account: in particular, diaries and dialogue journals, because much of the data collected in a diary or dialogue journal may be inaccessible through other research techniques (Nunan, 1992). Diaries are valued for containing "longer narrative" (Cohen 1998:40) and dialogue journals, which could be used to collect learners' thoughts and emotions in written form, are taken as a complement to diaries. The researcher acknowledges that diaries and dialogue journals would have been of considerable value in this study. For example, learners could have written their own accounts of their beliefs about CHCs and MSs with particular reference to RL. However, these two techniques, were not employed, partly because of the difficulties of analysis described by Cohen (1998:41) in terms of the volume of data produced and the potentially random nature

of the entries. The main reason for not using diaries or dialogue journals, however, was the subjects' limited time for research participation due to their heavy load of course tasks. They would only like to do *faster* or *shorter* work such as questionnaires, interviews, test papers which might altogether take only a couple of hours and once for all. The researcher was aware that clarification of data in diaries or dialogue journals might have been very time-consuming for the students and the researcher also felt that while it was reasonable to ask them to participate in a sense of single, brief research exercises---questionnaires, interviews and vocabulary test, it would have been unreasonable to ask any further demands on their time. If there were other opportunities for further studies, the researcher would consider using these techniques, as they might help researchers to find out what is significant to the learners. In addition, diary and journal writing may be of benefit to the students themselves because regular writing can help them become more aware of their strategies (Cohen 1998:42) and provide more detail for the researcher to use for research purposes.

The three research instruments were piloted prior to their use in the main study. For detailed information on the pilot study, please see Section 3.5.6.

3.4 Design of the research instruments

The values of research instruments were reviewed above. Taken together, a set of instruments chosen here serves to collect data for the present study. The next step is to provide detail information regarding design of the instruments.

3.4.1 Design of the questionnaire for EFL students

In this study, a Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ) (See Appendix 1) was designed, focusing on students' beliefs about the use of MSs in vocabulary learning. The main framework/formats for the questionnaire came from Oxford's (1990: 277-300) *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL), and Gu & Johnson's (1996: 673-679) *Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire* (VLSQ) (although Horwitz's (1987:127-128) *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI) was also one of the frameworks the researcher gave some consideration to). The question items were generated from the two questionnaires mentioned above, as well as from Gairns & Redman's (1986:93) statements of RL features (see Chapter 1). However, in the process of making the questionnaire, the strategies were selected and adapted to include only those MSs that pertain to the memorising of lexical items. It was designed to elicit learners' beliefs about MSs and their self-reported preference for MSs in vocabulary learning. Overall, this VLSQ was composed mostly of the previously designed items from the above two questionnaires. Because the two questionnaires represent sets of language learning or vocabulary learning strategies, some strategies were general in nature rather than focusing on MSs in relation to Chinese EFL learners as needed in the present study, some items were omitted and changed to reflect more accurately the MSs in learning EFL vocabulary in China. For example, among the 12 statements in Section 1, reflecting beliefs about the 4 categories of MSs, only Statements 3 & 6 were taken from the framework of Gu & Johnson (1996:674). The others were all devised by the researcher to represent specific beliefs to serve the present research study. For the 28 statements reflecting EFL vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs), Statements 13-20,

22, 34 were from Gu & Johnson (1996: 677-679) which were considered having direct relevance to the present study. For the purpose of making the statements more specific, Statements 21 & 25 were developed from Oxford's (1990) SILL, No.75, p.287 "I work with other language learners to practice, review or share information" by giving two statements. Statements 30 & 31 were also adapted from Oxford's SILL, No.4, p.284 "I associate the sound of the new word with the sound of a familiar word" by adding "in Chinese & in English". Statement 36 was made more general based on Oxford's SILL, No. 7, p.284 "I visualize the spelling of the new word in my mind" by changing the "new word" just into "word". The researcher, to serve the specific purposes of the present study, devised all other statements.

This VLSQ consisted of a mixture of closed and open questions with the aim of gaining clear responses to the closed questions and while obtaining more information from the open questions.

A Likert scale was used in the closed questions in order that the responses could readily be quantified and analysed. The participants were required to rate each item on a 5-point scale by circling the response (1,2,3,4 or 5) indicate "strongly agree" (1), "agree" (2), "no opinion" (3), "disagree" (4) or "strongly disagree" (5).

At the end of the VLSQ, there was an open-ended section so that the learners could provide qualitative data on their beliefs about VLSs.

The VLSQ included 3 sections:

Section 1. Statements relating to learners' beliefs about the value of MSs in vocabulary learning;

Section 2. Statements relating to learners' preferred VLSs (the 28 items in this section were randomly arranged to prevent the students from subconsciously grouping the strategies by category);

Section 3. Open questions designed to prompt the subjects to elaborate on their beliefs about MSs. The questions were designed to elicit from students the certain answers about MSs they believed to use for their vocabulary learning.

It should be noted here that all the instrument schedules in this study were designed in English (for they were willing to communicate in English as they were English majors at University level could make themselves understood in English). Questionnaires, tests, particularly interviews were also conducted in Chinese orally by both researcher and subjects to ensure of their understanding (in case there was any misunderstanding of the questions) in the hope of a full understanding and perfect description.

3.4.2 Design of the questionnaire for EFL teachers

Besides the questionnaire designed for the EFL students (see 3.3.2), another questionnaire was designed for EFL teachers from different parts of China. These were not the teachers of the 100 EFL student subjects in the study, but were working in other parts of China. There were several reasons for this:

1. To avoid similar beliefs between the students and their immediate teachers;

The main reason that the teachers of those 100 student subjects were not used was based on the assumption that their beliefs about learning strategies would be the same as or similar to their students.

Because of the Chinese culture of learning, which stresses mastery of knowledge and the authority of the teacher and the textbooks, Chinese teachers are expected not only to teach new words systematically and require students to memorise them, but also to

teach students methods of memorising them (Cortazzi & Jin 1996; Dong 2001). Because teachers are also perceived as “expert language learners” who share their learning experiences with their students, for example through introspection and retrospection (Dickenson 1992, in Cohen 1998:101), Chinese EFL teachers are also believed to be advanced learners. They have mastered English and have successfully used the strategies which they believe helpful, such as the use of mnemonic devices for remembering words, or specific strategies to develop a higher level of comprehension.

If they are advanced learners of English themselves, it is likely that they teach the strategies that they themselves use. The researcher felt, therefore, that surveying the views of teachers in different parts of China would give a clear indication of Chinese EFL learners’ general beliefs about the role of RL in vocabulary learning strategies.

2.To take advantage of a staff visit to China;

The researcher was fortunate in collecting the data from EFL teachers in different parts of China such as Guangzhou, Nanjing and Shanghai, during July, 2001 by asking several tutors from the University of Sunderland to distribute questionnaires at an academic conference they were attending in China. 50 questionnaire sheets (see Appendix 2) based on the research findings from the 100 student subjects’ questionnaires and interviews were distributed.

3.To confirm the generalisability of the research findings.

The main reason for using the EFL teacher questionnaire in this study was to confirm the findings gained from the student subjects, in terms of their generalisability. As the teacher questionnaires were distributed in several different regions, they could be considered to be representative of the whole of China, and thus to reflect the views of the majority of Chinese EFL learners (see Section 3.5 & Chapter 4, Section 4.2.10 for further discussion).

The teachers were asked to respond to the following:

1. Chinese EFL learners are believed to use more rote learning than any other memory strategies. Is this true? Why?
2. Rote learning suits Chinese learners best to memorise vocabulary. What do you think?
3. Rote learning works better than other memory strategies in China. Do you agree?
4. Rote learning is effective in vocabulary learning and it is helpful for all the learners at all stages---from beginners to the advanced learners. Please comment on this statement.
5. Would you please talk about your attitudes towards rote learning for Chinese EFL learners in China? Examples/evidence are preferable.

These were designed as leading questions to elicit certain answers from the teachers, hoping they could comment in depth. The questionnaire sheets were in English, because of the higher level of these “advanced English learners”, they could express themselves fully and clearly.

3.4.3 Design of the interview

In order to prompt the 100 EFL students to verbalise their beliefs about their strategies in vocabulary learning through MSs, the researcher used semi-structured interviews.

The interview set out to elicit more qualitative data and concentrated on the four categories of MSs, with the purpose of establishing whether the research hypotheses (see Section 3.1.1) were correct. The semi-structured interview form was employed for this research, firstly because it gave the interviewee a degree of power and control over the course of the interview; and secondly, because it gave the interviewer a great deal of flexibility (see Appendix 3).

The interview schedule consisted of two parts. In the first part, the interviewees were asked to number the 10 statements/comments on the VLSs presented by the interviewer from 1 to 10 according to their own preferences (a table was provided in Chapter 4, see Section 4.2.1), in order to confirm the information acquired from the questionnaire. The 10 statements were derived from all the questionnaires, and the questionnaires themselves were kept anonymous. In the second part, various questions related to beliefs about MSs in vocabulary learning were addressed, including the subjects' identification of the VLSs used by Chinese learners of English and their opinions regarding the role of RL in EFL learning. Table 3.1 lists the questions relating to each specific hypothesis. The first question, "Which vocabulary learning strategies do you think Chinese learners use the most and why?" was employed to test the hypothesis that Chinese EFL learners believe that most Chinese learners prefer RL strategies to other strategies. The second question, "Have you ever thought of getting rid of RL if you think it is traditional? Why?" was used

to elicit the subjects' beliefs about RL and the reasons why they continue to use it; and the third question, "Which kinds of strategies can help you personally become a better English learner?" were employed to test the hypothesis that Chinese learners believe that RL works better for memorising vocabulary than other strategies. The fourth question, "What do you think of the relationship between RL and the other three large categories of MSs as mentioned previously?" was used to test the hypothesis that Chinese learners believe that RL gives the basic knowledge to develop other memory strategies. The last question, "Which kinds of strategies do you think are useful for learners at different levels of English?" was to test the hypothesis that Chinese learners believe that rote learning is effective both in the initial stages and the higher stages of language learning (See Appendix 3).

Table 3.1 Interview questions in relation to hypotheses

Interview questions	Hypotheses
1. Which vocabulary learning strategies do you think Chinese learners use the most and why?	1.Chinese EFL learners state that they prefer RL strategies to other memory strategies and that they use more RL strategies than other memory strategies.
2. Have you ever thought of getting rid of RL if you think it is traditional? Why?	2.Chinese EFL learners believe that RL works better for memorising vocabulary than other strategies.
3. Which kinds of strategies can help you personally become a better English learner?	3.Those who believe in the effectiveness of RL perform better in vocabulary tests than those who do not.
4. What do you think of the relationship between RL and the other three large categories of MSs as mentioned previously?"	4.Chinese EFL learners believe that RL conveys the basic knowledge to develop other memory strategies.
5. Which kinds of strategies do you think are useful for learners at different levels of English?	5.Chinese EFL learners believe that RL is effective both in the initial stages and the higher stages of language learning.
Reasons given in answer to questions 1. & 2	6.RL is believed to be of Confucian cultural value in China.

Although the semi-structured interview format allowed the students a degree of control, during the interviews, student subjects' high respect for the researcher as an honourable teacher revealed the influence of Confucian heritage cultures. For example, they would like to please the researcher with "right" answers by asking "Am I right?" The researcher explained clearly that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers and ensured them that their opinions were only for academic purposes. Thus the researcher remained neutral in the interview process.

3.4.4 Design of the test

As discussed in 3.2.3, it was not easy to decide what type of vocabulary test was most suitable, with so many possibilities available.

According to Nation (1990:8) before testing it is important to be clear about why the learners are being tested and what the information will be used for. Nation lists 6 reasons for testing:

1. To find learners' total vocabulary size.
2. To compare vocabulary knowledge before and after the course.
3. To keep a continuing check on progress.
4. To encourage learning by setting short-term goals.
5. To see the effectiveness of your teaching.
6. To investigate learning.

Nation's 6 reasons listed above should be regarded as useful guidelines in the design of a vocabulary test. However, all things considered, none of the reasons could fit in with the reasons for the present study except the first one, because the vocabulary test in this study did not intend to investigate how the subjects learned English words

in real situation, or to guide the teaching and learning of EFL vocabulary. As the researcher was based in the UK and was unable to conduct extended research in China, the researcher could not teach the subjects new words, ask them to learn them, test them, and then ask them how they learned them, and see if there was a correlation between rote-learned words and right answers in the test, and between non-rote learned words and wrong answers in the test. If there were another chance to do this study, different methods would be used in natural classroom settings by teaching the subjects new words and observing the memory strategies they use for several months or a year and then comparing the results from RL users and non-RL users to see the difference relating to their beliefs. Data obtained in this way would be different from that obtained in the present study and the observational records might help to lend a more impartial, objective perspective to the research study, rather than having the study rely solely on data provided by the subjects' self report (Cohen 1998). However, many of the language use strategies cannot be observed since they are mentalistic and not behavioristic as discussed in 3.3.1, and there many of the RL strategies may be used outside the classroom.

In order to find the subjects' English vocabulary size, therefore, the researcher used the university vocabulary list designed to test the vocabulary of the subjects as EFL learners at a level leading to the English-major bachelor degree. Replies to the questionnaire and interviews were correlated with the results of the vocabulary test to see if there was any significant association between the subjects' beliefs about RL and their test results. The test based on the university vocabulary list assessed learners' knowledge in a way which was appropriate to this study. The design of the vocabulary test paper will be discussed later in this section.

Nation (1990:9) states: Once the purposes and uses of testing have been decided, the next points to consider are what kind of knowledge is to be tested, and what type of test is most suitable. For the purpose of this study, what is involved in learning a word will be first clarified.

Read (1997:315) states:

In an early article on L1 vocabulary testing, Cronbach (1942) identified what he called five types of behaviour involved in understanding a word: *generalisation* (being able to define it); *application* (selecting an appropriate use of it); *breadth of meaning* (recalling its different meanings); *precision of meaning* (applying it correctly to all possible situations); and *availability* (being able to use it productively). He noted the vocabulary tests at that time focused only on the first two: generalisation and application. More recently, several writers on SL vocabulary (e.g. Richards, 1976; Nation, 1990:30-33) have offered lists and frameworks that specify multiple dimensions of word knowledge. Richards' inventory, for instance, includes knowing the relative frequency of a word, its syntactic properties, its underlying form and derivatives, its network of associations with other words, and its connotations. Ideally, then a vocabulary test might be designed to determine the extent to which each of these aspects of a word was known.

As Schmitt (2000:4) states:

There are different degrees of knowing a word. Being able to understand a word is known as *receptive knowledge* and is normally connected with listening and reading. If we are able to produce a word of our own accord when speaking or writing, then that is considered *productive knowledge*.

Nation (1990:32) also gives a description of *receptive knowledge* and *productive knowledge*:

Productive knowledge of a word includes receptive knowledge and extends it. It involves knowing how to pronounce the word, how to write and spell it, how to use it in correct grammatical patterns along with the words it usually collocates with. Productive knowledge also involves not using the word too often if it is typically a low-frequency word, and using it in suitable situations. It involves using the word to stand for the meaning it represents and being able to think of suitable substitutes for the word if there are any.

Nation (1990:31) also creates a table of a distinction between receptive and productive learning of a word in detail by using George's (1983) four general classification criteria — Form; Position; Function and Meaning, each of which is divided into two parts, one dealing with receptive knowledge, and one dealing with productive knowledge (see Table 3.2 below):

Table 3.2 Knowing a word

Form		
Spoken form	R	what does the word sound like?
	P	How is the word pronounced?
Written form	R	What does the word look like?
	P	How is the word written and spelled?
Position		
Grammatical patterns	R	In what patterns does the word occur?
	P	In what patterns must we use the word?
Collocations	R	What words or types of words can be expected before or after the word?
	P	What words or types of words must we use with this word?
Function		
Frequency	R	How common is the word?
	P	How often should the word be used?
Appropriateness	R	Where would we expect to meet this word?
	P	Where can this word be used?
Meaning		
Concept	R	What does the word mean?
	P	What word should be used to express this meaning?
Associations	R	What other words does this word make us think of?
	P	What other words could we use instead of this one?
R=receptive knowledge P=productive knowledge		

Source: Nation (1990:31).

The vocabulary test devised for the present study could assess both *receptive* and *productive* knowledge. Because of the features of RL identified in this study, this might suggest that the design of the test allowed RL learners to get a higher mark than non-RL users. The researcher was aware of this. However, it does not invalidate the research, because while the researcher recognised that the test may favour RL users, the focus of the research was on whether the subjects' *beliefs* about RL affected their achievement on the test rather than investigating the relationship between their strategies and outcomes in learning English. It might be possible in the future study to devise a test which *doesn't* favour RL users by extending the test paper to include a passage with words not in the University Word List to guess the meaning of the underlined words in context or in some other ways.

In this study, the words or phrases for the test paper were based on the subjects' university 6000-word vocabulary list, and the question formats came from the framework by Watcyn-Jones (1990) and Thomas (1991). A set of words was selected from the university's EFL vocabulary list, then divided into five sections following the framework by Watcyn-Jones (1990) and Thomas (1991) (See Appendices 4.1 & 4.2). Devising a new test in this way was felt to be preferable to using ready published test papers in China as it ensured that it was "new" to the subjects and avoided diligent Chinese students' "pre-preparation". In designing the test paper, the researcher was able to avoid the possibility that some participants might not know the list on which this test was based, because all Chinese students are presented with the 6000 University vocabulary list as their essential knowledge when entering university, and many are aware of it even before entering university.

The test paper (See Appendix 4) consisted of 5 parts---Part 1 definitions (30%); Part 2 complete the proverbs (10%); Part 3 collocation (10%); Part 4 word formation (30%) and Part 5 word discrimination (20%).

The first three parts were used to test the respondents' understanding of the meaning of the selected words, and collocation for idioms and fixed phrases in some recognizable group or pattern. The questions generally fit in with the features of *receptive knowledge* of knowing a word as discussed above, which might favour RL strategy users, involving the use of a dictionary definition and collocations.

Part 4 was used to find out if the respondents could use grammatical inflections, including prefixes and suffixes. The questions reflect both *receptive* and *productive knowledge*. They required not only knowledge of vocabulary but also understanding of the form and function of each word in context.

Part 5 was set to see if the respondents had the ability to see which shade of meaning was most suitable for the context that it occurred in. Like Part 4 it was designed to assess both receptive and productive knowledge. Thus the test did not only assess whether the subjects could recognise written forms or recall the meaning of single words, but also whether they could make associations with other related words in context and understand what word should be used to express that meaning. This allowed the researcher to evaluate the full range of learning supported by RL strategies.

Scores represented the number of correct responses in the test. The full score was 100 from the 100 questions, and the pass mark was 60 in accordance with the most commonly accepted assessment approach in China.

3.4.4-1 Test subjects

Subjects at 4 levels were chosen for the same test paper in order to assess their EFL vocabulary at 4 different stages: an early though not absolute beginners' stage (these learners had all had 6 years of English learning experience in secondary schools before entering the university), an intermediate stage and a fairly advanced stage. According to the syllabus especially made for undergraduate English majors throughout China, students at all stages are required to master the same 6000 English words, but are expected to enlarge the vocabulary list when they reach Stage 2.

Because all the participants at four different stages responded to the same paper with the same questions, it would be no surprise if students in higher stages got better scores than the ones in lower stages just simply due to the length of familiarising themselves with the word list. However, all the students could have been familiar with the list from the beginning of the university level course.

3.5 Procedures of data collection

3.5.1 Collaborative link

To establish contact was vitally important to guarantee collaboration from the university involved. At the very beginning of the study, a covering letter was sent to the collaborating university in China to ask for help with the data collection. A quick reply showed the willingness to collaborate in this research. Because of the long distance between the researcher and the collaborating university, letters, e-mails and

telephones were constantly used for exchanging information for the research. After serious discussion, the purposes for the collaborative link were agreed as follows:

- a) to gain the trust and support of the university course leaders, and to convince them of the importance and usefulness of this study;
- b) to explain the instruments used for the study;
- c) to make it clear that the participants' views would not be used for any political motive, such as supporting a government education plan;
- d) to explain the voluntarily-based co-operation;
- e) to emphasise the expectation of a high rate of reply;
- f) to send copies of schedules for the three instruments (questionnaire, interview and vocabulary test) for the leaders' approval.

3.5.2 The student questionnaire procedure

100 students in several separate groups were brought to the classroom or office wherever convenient, and the three instruments were administered.

The questionnaire was administered by the department leaders and class teachers during November, 2000. Subjects received oral instructions from their teachers (who had agreed with the researcher on how to administer the questionnaire) about how to complete the questionnaire, and were encouraged to seek clarification of any items they did not understand.

This VLSQ took about 50 minutes to complete, including about 5 or 10 minutes' initial explanation, which was just the length of one class time. The questions were

carefully gauged with this amount of time in mind to ensure that they could be completed.

3.5.3 Test procedure

The 40 to 60 minute-vocabulary test was administered immediately after the questionnaire was filled in and was collected together with the questionnaire.

Having agreed with the researcher before the test, those teachers who helped with the invigilation emphasised to the subjects that the test results would have absolutely no influence upon the subjects' degree marks. The researcher explained that this test was only used for academic analysis. The subjects were therefore doing the test in a relatively relaxed atmosphere.

3.5.4 Interview procedure

The first step was to ask the potential interviewees if they would like to assist the project by coming for an interview. They were told that their comments on their habitual strategies and beliefs in relation to RL would prove extremely helpful in this research, and that total discretion with their personal details was guaranteed. No political purpose, but academic research, for the interview was emphasised.

The interview was conducted during the period from 11th to 26th, November 2000, informally, at a place convenient to them (for example, in an office of the English Department, or in the classroom). Each subject was interviewed individually in both English (for those who were they were willing to communicate in English and were able to express well) and Chinese (in case there was any misunderstanding of the

questions) to ensure a full understanding and clear description. After a brief exchange of pleasantries to set the interviewee at ease, the interview began. Each interview lasted between 15 and 25 minutes. (The subjects were expected to take 15 minutes to read and rank the orders for the 10 statements and 10 minutes for answering the questions.) With the subjects' permission the interviews were fully recorded and some notes were taken during and following the interview.

3.5.5 The teacher questionnaire procedure

The teacher questionnaire procedure turned out to be very simple and easy. As provided in Section 3.3.3, three tutors at the University of Sunderland, who went to China for academic conferences in July 2001, took a total of 50 questionnaire sheets to their meeting places and passed these on to Chinese EFL teachers at the conferences. Within a month, 42 out of 50 questionnaires were returned.

3.5.6 Pilot study

Even though the schedules were carefully planned, it could not be guaranteed that they would work well in practice. Because of the potential problems in the use of all elicitation instruments, Nunan (1992:145) argues strongly that all research should have a piloting phase. Bell (1993:84) also points out "All data-gathering instruments should be piloted to test how long it takes recipients to complete them, to check that all questions and instructions are clear and to enable you to remove any items which do not yield usable data." Thomas (1996:122) concludes that it is better to pilot with two or three colleagues than not to pilot at all.

For the purpose of this research, a pilot study was used to find out if the questions were yielding the kind of data required and to eliminate any questions which might be ambiguous or confusing to the respondents. This was expected to result in some amendments being made to the instruments actually used in the study.

3.5.6-1 Pilot subjects

All the questions in the instruments (questionnaire, test & interview) were piloted with a small sample of subjects before being used. As Allison *et al* (1996:95) state: “For this purpose you need people who are of ability and background similar to your target population and who are willing to think aloud while filling in....*They* are the ultimate judges of what is clear and what is not.”

The pilot subjects were selected in England. Key features of the subjects were summarised in Table 3.2, which formed a comparison of pilot study subjects and final study subjects.

Twenty Chinese learners of English in Newcastle upon Tyne were initially invited to participate in the pilot study, and of these, 16 subjects participated in the pilot. They were broken down into 4 sub-groups according to their number of years of learning English in China, before coming to the UK. These 4 groups of subjects were used as consistent with the 4 stages of the final subjects from whom the researcher intended to collect information and draw conclusions. 13 of the 16 subjects were registered students in Newcastle upon Tyne, and 3 were women married to students, but also had several years' experience of EFL learning. Of all the subjects, 5 were presently studying at the University of Newcastle, 7 at Northumbria University, 2 at Newcastle College and 3 were dependants at home but with 7 to 10 years' EFL learning

background. Table 3.3 presents the pilot subjects' information in relation to the subjects in main study.

Table 3.3: The types and number of learners used for this study

<i>Final study subjects</i>			
No. of subjects (100)	No. of stages/grades (4)	No. of years regular EFL education (7-10)	Present residence
25	1	7	Shenyang, China
25	2	8	
25	3	9	
25	4	10	
<i>Pilot study subjects</i>			
(16)			
4	1	7	Newcastle, UK
4	2	8	
4	3	9	
4	4	10	

Obviously, there were also differences between the pilot subjects and the final subjects such as the difference between sample numbers, the relationship between the researcher and the subjects (most of the pilot subjects were the researcher's acquaintances or friends in the UK, and all the subjects in the main study were strangers), and particularly their present places of residence which might involve an environmental factor affecting the research results: all the subjects in the pilot were living in an English speaking country and temporarily or permanently surrounded by spoken/written English. However, the differences should not be obstacles for carrying on the research, for firstly, a small sample of subjects in a pilot run might be advisable (Allison *et al* 1996); secondly, as Allison *et al* point out that personal friends could be respondents for piloting, but the researcher should be sure to get them to be critical, and thirdly, all the pilot subjects had learnt English in China

before coming to the UK and their backgrounds of learning English were almost the same as those of the final subjects. Therefore, the pilot study was considered to be valid.

3.5.6-2 Pilot procedure

The three instruments were administered to each of the 16 subjects in the pilot study during the period from 20th April to 5th May, 2000.

As planned, the Questionnaire took about 50 minutes and the test took 40 minutes. The average length of each interview was 15 to 25 minutes. (The subjects were required to take 15 minutes to order the 20 statements and 10 minutes for answering the questions.)

3.5.6-3 Results of the pilot study

The responses to the pilot study confirmed the hypothesis that Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies are preferable to other memory strategies for learning and memorising vocabulary. They hold positive beliefs about RL and believe that RL strategies are consistent with traditional Chinese culture and values. The pilot subjects offered six reasons why RL was popularly used in China:

- 1). Chinese cultural background;
- 2). EFL environment;
- 3). Traditional habit;
- 4). Examination demand;
- 5). Chinese linguistic background/the way of learning the mother tongue and
- 6). Failure to try out new strategies.

The participants gave 100 per cent support to the use of RL and continued reliance on RL in learning English vocabulary both in China and in the UK. However, their vocabulary scores were much lower than expected. Of the 16 subjects, only 6 achieved a score above 60%. This did not confirm one of the sub-hypotheses (see 3.1.1), because strong beliefs about RL did not correlate with high achievement on the test. However, the researcher felt that this did not affect the researcher's evaluation of the association between the subjects' beliefs and their test results. The subjects revealed that they strongly believed the effectiveness of RL strategies and the vocabulary test items were familiar to them. In fact, they were not only familiar with the university vocabulary list, but for the students who wished to study in a English university either at post or under-graduate level, it was necessary to take language tests such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or IELTS (International English Language Testing System) before applying to enter many universities in the UK or other English-speaking countries. However, subjects' responses during the interviews revealed that the ESL environment in the UK might affect their use of RL strategies even though they were all strong believers in RL with CHCs and strong users of RL. While they stressed the importance of formal classroom learning of grammar and vocabulary in the EFL environment in China, especially in relation to the pressure of exams, they felt that they owed their progress in oral communication in English to the informal ESL learning environment in the UK (see Chapter 5, Section 5.3.2 for further discussion). Their comparatively poor test results, however, reinforced their belief in the values of RL with CHCs and suggested continued reliance on RL in learning English vocabulary both in China and in the UK. They believed that their test results would be much better if their use of RL strategies had been kept intact. The researcher believed that the hypothesis

was confirmed and the pilot test results did not affect the researcher's evaluation of the association between subjects' beliefs and their test results. Actually, their belief that their poor results were linked to a possible *reduction* in the use of RL strategies adds further evidence to strengthen the hypothesis.

3.5.6-4 Amendments to the research

The researcher received invaluable support and encouragement from the pilot subjects. Their comments and suggestions carried a lot of weight in the revision and refining of the instruments. As some adaptation of the questions from other researchers' work was made, with the intention of rendering the questions/statements understandable for the participants involved in the study (e.g. avoidance of too many technical terms and red herrings, which could produce unquantifiable responses and uninterpretable results), piloting was essential in this study. The amendments are listed below:

a) Interview questions in Part 1

For the pilot study, the subjects were asked to rank 20 statements about VLSs in order of preference. However, 20 statements proved too many and there was a risk that participants would lose their place in deciding the degree of importance in the order of statements. The subjects said that loss of information might occur. Therefore, the 20 statements were cut down to 10. The statements from 11 to 20 which were designed to serve as distracters, referring to other strategies such as

cognitive, and metacognitive strategies rather than MSs in vocabulary learning, were eliminated.

b) Test

40 minutes did not seem long enough for answering 100 questions. Therefore the time was lengthened by 20 minutes.

c) Glossary

A glossary (See Appendix 5) was prepared and given out to EFL students, firstly for their own interest; secondly for confirmation of the meaning of terms if necessary; and thirdly to offer convenience to those who read this thesis in the future.

All instruments in the pilot study were tested for reliability. The reliability of a test is defined, according to Brown (1988:98), “as the extent to which the results can be considered consistent or stable”. Of the three ways of estimating reliability (test-retest reliability; equivalent forms reliability and internal-consistency reliability) which have most often been used in language studies, internal-consistency estimates were chosen. The reason for this is that they have the distinct advantage of being estimable from a single form of a test administered only once—in contrast to test-retest and equivalent forms reliabilities, which require either two administrations or two forms (Brown 1988:99).

The internal consistency reliability coefficient (alpha coefficient) for the beliefs in the questionnaire about the four categories of MSs---Rote learning; Creating mental

linkages; Applying images & sounds and Structured reviewing was $\alpha=.70$; $\alpha=.87$; $\alpha=.87$; $\alpha=.70$ respectively. The coefficient for the learning strategy preferences in each of the four above categories was $\alpha=.74$; $\alpha=.74$; $\alpha=.73$; $\alpha=.73$ and the internal consistency reliability coefficient (alpha coefficient) for the vocabulary test yielded $\alpha=.78$.

Overall, the pilot study showed that there were no major changes required to the data collection methods, and that there were no major problems with using the modified instruments from the pilot study in the full study.

3.6 Design of the data analysis

Data collected by means of questionnaires, interviews or any other methods mean very little until they are analysed and evaluated (Bell 1993). A number of published studies on beliefs about language learning strategies have been conducted by using methods of statistical analysis (e.g. Bond, 1996, Asbjornson, 1999, and Sakui & Gaies, 1999, used factor analysis to determine how subjects' beliefs were organised). Most of the data analysis techniques in the present study were performed with a computer, since it could handle the analysis of most quantitative and qualitative research data. Most of the data in this study was fed directly into SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences), Version 8.0. Though the interview data were also coded and put into SPSS, the specific contents of subjects' statements were not amenable to quantitative analysis, but provided valuable material for qualitative analysis which served as evidence to support arguments.

The analysis of data was carried out in a range of different ways:

3.6.1. Descriptive analysis: *Descriptive analysis* refers to methods of organising and summarising data by editing variable names and value labels into SPSS which can generate several common, one-number statistics such as the mean, standard deviation (SD), variance, maximum and minimum values, range and sum (Kinnear & Gray 1999). *Descriptives* within the *Summarize* menu in SPSS provides a quick way of obtaining a range of common descriptive statistics, both of central tendency and of dispersion. SPSS also provides very convenient ways to get results, and the output listings of statistical values provided in the SPSS manual after the operation enable researchers to ascertain quickly whereabouts the results lie. However, it is important to understand the theory and know the procedures clearly before conducting the data analysis process. Before the researcher proceeded with the data analysis, therefore, certain preparatory steps had been taken such as classifying raw data into categories, and checking whether the data had been correctly entered into the computer. Descriptive analysis was used in this study to organise and summarise all the responses in the questionnaire under each category for mean and SD to see if learners believed they used more RL than other memory strategies. The internal consistency reliability value for each category was also included.

3.6.2. Descriptive analysis was also used for the vocabulary test to summarise the scores for three groups---high achieving, borderline between high/low scores and low achieving.

3.6.3. Chi-square analysis: *Chi-square analysis* was used to test if there was a significant association between the subjects' beliefs and the test results.

3.6.4. Condorcet's method: *Condorcet's method* is named after the 18th century election theorist who invented it. It is a *pairwise* election system where ranked ballots are used to stimulate many head-to-head elections. The winner of a Condorcet election is the candidate who wins a majority in all of the pairwise elections. Condorcet's method was adapted to organise the rank-ordering data for Part 1 of the interview schedule to identify the majority of preferences for the memory strategies. Kendall's *W*, or coefficient of concordance was also used to determine whether there was agreement among the 100 subjects in ranking the ten strategies. The significance of *W* was also tested.

3.6.5. Content analysis: Wenden's (1987) procedure of content analysis was adapted and developed in this study and applied to the second part of the interview data analysis.

According to Kerling (1973), content analysis is a way of studying and analysing written communications in a systematic manner. In some cases the communications have not been produced for research purposes. For example, letters, diaries and newspaper editorials can be subjected to content analysed. Bryman (2001:177) states: "In a sense, content analysis is not a research method in that it is an approach to the analysis of documents and texts rather than a means of generating data. However, it is usually treated as a research method because of its distinctive approach to analysis". As long ago as 1969, Holsti (1969:14) described content analysis as any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages. More recently, Neuman (in Leavy, 2001:1) has offered the following description:

Content analysis is a technique for examining information, or content, in written or symbolic material... In content analysis, a researcher first identifies a body of material to analyse... and then creates a system for recording specific aspects of it. The system might include counting how often certain words or themes occur. Finally, the researcher records what was found in the material. He or she often measures information in the content as numbers... Content analysis is used for exploratory and explanatory research but is most often used in descriptive research. (Neuman, 1997:31).

For the purpose of content analysis, recordings of interviews were transcribed, the subjects' beliefs about RL were categorised and the factors affecting the use of RL in China were identified, although Wenden's (1987) guidelines did not seem to be specific enough for the researcher to follow in the present study. For detailed discussion, see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3.

3.6.6. Factor analysis: *Factor analysis* was used in this study based on the responses from Part 1 and Part 2 of the questionnaire in an attempt to validate and verify factors which were believed to underlie the data and to summarize the features of Chinese EFL learners with CHCs. Following Kinnear & Gray (1999:358), "the purpose of factor analysis is to discern and quantify the dimensions supposed to underlie performance on a variety of tasks. The factors produced by factor analysis are mathematical entities, which can be thought of as classificatory axes, with respect to which the tests in a battery can be plotted." The *factor loadings* indicate the level of correlation between the factors and the different variables used in the analysis. Those variables which have the *highest* loadings with the factors are then used to define the factor. They are reported in the form of coefficients. After the variables with the highest loadings are identified, the researcher examines the factors with a

view to interpreting them and understanding what feature they represent (Seliger & Shohamy 1989:229).

3.6.7 Triangulation: Seliger & Shohamy (1989:123) states: “The use of a variety of methods to collect data allows the researcher to validate findings through triangulation....Use of the process increases the reliability of the conclusions reached”. In collecting the second language data, some qualitative researchers use video or audio tapes to confirm the data from observation or manual transcription by asking other judges to evaluate the tapes (e.g.Oliver 2001). The triangulation as an analysis method was performed as an additional exploratory step in this study, since the present method seems different from those ways in the previous studies (e.g. using video or audio tapes).

In order to *confirm* the findings from Part 1 of the questionnaire, the researcher used the first part of the interview as a form of triangulation of the data collected with the questionnaire (using slightly different wording for the interview) by asking the subjects to rank strategies of preferences. The detailed information will be presented in Chapter 4 (see 4.2.1).

3.6.8. Generalisability: Confirmation of the generalisability of the results from the study was achieved through *triangulation*, using the responses from the questionnaire to Chinese EFL teachers. As Bryman (2001:75) states: “Given that it is rarely feasible to send questionnaires to or interview whole populations (such as all members of a town, or the whole population of a country, or all members of an organisation), we have to sample. However, we will want the sample to be as representative as possible in order to be able to say that the results are not unique to

the particular group upon whom the research was conducted.” The decision to use Chinese teachers of English was based on the assumption that their beliefs would be similar to the students’ as they were EFL learners as well teachers. If the teacher questionnaire responses matched the students’ responses to questionnaires and interviews, it would be reasonable to conclude that the findings were generalized beyond the student subjects that made up the sample.

The methods of data collection and data analysis to serve the purpose of this study have been discussed in this chapter. The results of the data analysis will be presented and discussed in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

STATEMENT OF RESULTS

This chapter explains the data treatment for each of the instruments employed in this study, presents the responses from each of the instruments and provides a summary of the results.

The methods of data analysis in relation to each research instrument employed in this study were discussed in the last chapter (see 3.6). These methods were descriptive analysis, Condorcet's method, Kendall *W*, factor analysis, content analysis, chi-square and triangulation. The results obtained from each of the research instruments will be presented in turn in this chapter. The links between the data analysis and the research questions will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

4.1 Results of the student questionnaire

This section of the chapter looks at the responses from the student questionnaire.

The vocabulary learning strategies questionnaire (VLSQ) contained closed questions in Parts 1 and 2, and open questions in Part 3 (see Appendix 1). The results from each part will be presented separately.

4.1.1 Student questionnaire: Part 1. Beliefs about memory strategies (MSs)

Part 1, which focused on beliefs about MSs in vocabulary learning adapted from Oxford's four categories of MSs (see Chapter 1, Section 1.1.1-2 (4)), included 12 statements representing the 4 categories of strategies (rote learning; creating mental

linkages; applying images and sounds and reviewing well). The responses (Strongly agree, Agree, No opinion, Disagree and Strongly disagree) for each category of statements/questions were directly fed into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 8.0). A descriptive analysis of the responses suggests that Chinese EFL learners believe that of all the MSs for vocabulary learning, RL strategies were preferable. Table 4.1 presents the descriptive statistics of respondents' beliefs in descending order by their mean values. An abbreviated form of longer statements in the VLSQ is presented in the table, for example, Item 5 "The translation equivalents of Chinese and English are helpful when a new word appears" was cut down to "The translation equivalents are helpful". The numbers in parentheses next to the statements represent the item numbers in the VLSQ schedule. In calculating subjects' beliefs about memory strategy preferences on a scale from 1 to 5, the researcher followed Sheorey's (1999) classification: high (mean of 3.5 or higher), medium (mean of 2.5-3.4), and low (mean of 2.4 or lower).

Table 4.1 Response to students' beliefs about MSs in vocabulary learning (Questionnaire items 1-12)

Categories & abbreviated statements		Rank	Mean	SD
<i>High usage (M=3.5 or above)</i>				
RL	English words have fixed meanings(3)	1	4.30	.67
RL	Vocabulary should be learnt through repetition(1)	2	4.23	.93
RL	RL is an effective way to remember words(2)	3	4.18	1.04
RL	The translation equivalents are helpful(5)	4	4.08	1.01
CML	Words should be acquired in context(6)	5	3.98	1.12
RW	Structured reviewing is only useful for exams(12)	6	3.97	1.31
RW	Reviewing regularly is very helpful(11)	7	3.90	1.10
AIS	Semantic mapping is valuable for memory(9)	8	3.76	.878
RL	Word list/cards are very helpful(4)	9	3.57	1.01
<i>Medium usage (M=2.5 to 3.4)</i>				
CML	Organised material is easier to memorise(7)	10	3.47	1.11
AIS	Mentally picturing can quicken memorisation(8)	11	3.32	1.14
AIS	Keyword method should be used (10)	12	2.78	.89
<i>Low usage (M=2.4 or lower)</i>				

RL, rote learning; RW, reviewing; AIS, applying images & sounds; CML, creating mental linkages.

As can be seen from the table, the average of the belief items ranged from a high of 4.30 to a low of 2.78, on a scale of 1 to 5. The responses indicated only two types--- high and medium. 9 of the 12 MSs (75%) had mean values exceeding 3.57 (high usage) and 3 MSs (25%) fell in the medium usage category (mean values between 2.78 and 3.47). There was no item which had a mean value in the low usage category. The overall mean for the sample was 3.80, indicating overall high usage of the strategies listed. The mean of the rote learning strategy is the highest of the 4 MSs categories (M=4.07), followed by reviewing (M=3.94); creating mental linkages (M=3.73); and applying images and sounds (M=3.29). The internal consistency reliability coefficient, the alpha value of each category was: RL $\alpha=.90$; reviewing $\alpha=.90$; mental linkage $\alpha=.86$ and applying images & sounds $\alpha=.63$.

4.1.2 Student questionnaire: Part 2. Memory strategy preferences

Part 2, which focused on the subjects' beliefs about their preferred MSs they actually used in vocabulary learning, included 28 statements (items 13-40). Table 4.2 presents the results of descriptive analysis of respondents' preferred MSs based on their responses to Part 2 of the questionnaire. Similarly as in Part 1 of the questionnaire presented above, the subjects were required to rate each statement on a 5-point scale by circling one of the responses (Strongly agree, Agree, No opinion, Disagree and Strongly disagree, which were numbered as 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) to indicate their beliefs about what they actually did when they were dealing with English words. As in Table 4.1, abbreviated forms of longer statements from the VLSQ are presented in

the table. For example, the sentence “I make vocabulary lists of new words that I meet” was cut down to “Make list to learn new words”. The numbers in parentheses next to the statements represent the item numbers in the VLSQ schedule.

Table 4.2 Response to students’ beliefs about memory strategy preferences for vocabulary learning (Questionnaire items 13---40)

Categories & abbreviated statements	Rank	Mean	SD
<i>High usage (M=3.5 or above)</i>			
RL Memorise English words & Chinese equivalents(22)	1	4.10	1.38
RL Memorise set phrases and collocations(39)	2	4.08	1.11
RL Use after memorising the words(27)	3	4.02	.97
RL Make vocabulary lists of new words(13)	4	3.88	1.27
RL Do vocabulary exercises many times(23)	5	3.83	1.28
RL Use rote learning all the time(40)	6	3.78	1.35
CML Remember words by grouping into categories(34)	7	3.69	1.02
RW Do regular and structured reviews of new words(18)	7	3.69	.94
RL Do oral spelling exercises of words with others(21)	8	3.68	1.25
RL Write words repeatedly to remember the words(20)	9	3.67	1.30
RL Repeat words aloud to oneself for memorising(19)	10	3.65	1.32
RL Seek accurate keys for the test(38)	11	3.58	1.43
RL Use cards with two sides of words & meaning(14)	12	3.53	1.37
RL Remember dictionary definitions for words(37)	13	3.50	1.27
<i>Medium usage (M=2.5 to 3.4)</i>			
RL Keep the vocabulary list of new words(15)	14	3.47	1.34
RL Go through the lists repeatedly to understand(16)	15	3.42	1.32
RL Take the vocabulary cards wherever going(17)	16	3.34	1.39
RW Recall words by pair checking with someone(25)	17	3.28	1.40
CML Compose sentences with the words being learnt(24)	18	3.25	1.23
CML Search synonyms & antonyms for new words(35)	19	3.23	1.45
CML Read related topic to be exposed to vocabulary(32)	20	3.08	1.33
CML Remember words that share similar letters(29)	21	2.99	1.17
AIS Associate sounds of words with similar English(30)	22	2.96	1.18
CML Remember words by roots or affixes(33)	23	2.91	1.22
CML Group words by grammatical class(26)	24	2.87	1.13
CML Remember examples of word use in a context(28)	25	2.79	1.10
AIS Associate words with similar Chinese sound(31)	26	2.60	1.10
<i>Low usage (M=2.4 or lower)</i>			
AIS Visualise the spelling of the word in the head(36)	27	2.32	1.21

RL, rote learning; RW, reviewing; AIS, applying images & sounds; CML, creating mental linkages. Strategies with the same mean values were accorded the same rank (7).

As can be seen from Table 4.2, the average of individual strategy items ranged from a high of 4.10 to a low of 2.32 on a scale of 1-5, and the overall mean for the sample was 3.27, indicating overall medium usage of the strategies listed. 14 of the 28 strategies (50%) had mean values exceeding 3.50 (high usage) and 13 strategies (about 46%) fell in the medium usage category (mean values between 3.47 and 3.32). While no items in Table 4.1 had a mean value which fell into the low usage category, 1 strategy (about 4%) fell in the low usage category in Table 4.2. This was “Visualise the spelling of the word in the head” belonging to *AIS*, applying images & sounds. As in Table 4.1, the mean of the rote learning strategy is the highest of the 4 MSs categories ($M=4.07$). This was followed by reviewing ($M=3.49$); creating mental linkages ($M=3.10$); and applying images and sounds ($M=2.63$). The internal consistency reliability coefficient, the alpha value of each category was: $\alpha=.68$; $\alpha=.74$; $\alpha=.67$; $\alpha=.60$.

It may be noticed that, of the 4 MSs, there appeared more items in the questionnaire schedule referring to RL strategies than to other 3 MSs. The only explanation was that some features of RL which were not included in other studies (see Chapter 1) were identified by the researcher in this study. Thus, a greater number of RL strategies were listed in comparison with other 3 MSs. This may have created an unintended bias in the data, which the researcher did not think that it affected the results because of many ways of data analysis to attain as close the data as possible.

4.1.3 Student questionnaire: Part 3. Students’ responses to open questions

At the end of the VLSQ, there was an open-ended section with three questions to prompt the subjects to elaborate on their beliefs about MSs. The questions were

designed to elicit from students the certain answers about MSs they believed to use for their vocabulary learning. The responses to the open-ended part of the questionnaire will be presented in turn. As the closed questionnaire data, the data from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire were also coded based on the subjects' responses and categorised as frequencies to make the data amenable to analysis, using SPSS (version 8.0).

Open question 1: What are the most effective strategies that you believe produce better results when you learn vocabulary?

The responses focused on two large categories, **rote learning and reviewing** with 100 % agreement. Repetition as a main feature of RL both in spoken and written form were highly believed to be the most effective strategies for their learning and memorising vocabulary.

Open question 2: What do you think of rote learning for Chinese learners in vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs)?

The predominant response was "Suits Chinese EFL learners". The responses were coded as **most effective way, sometimes good and not the only way**. 90% of the subjects responded "most effective way", 7% of them revealed partial support to RL and 3% responded "only one of the ways for learning". This statement indicated that the learners not only used RL but also other MSs.

Open question 3: Do you have any other strategies for either learning or memorising vocabulary? (Please specify).

The majority of the subjects (95%) answered "No" to this question as they believed that their use of RL was a combination of many ways such as repetition, reviewing,

practice, understanding including interaction or communication. 5% remainder of the subjects revealed some other strategies such as guessing the meaning in the context when they were not sure or reading newspaper, China Daily to strengthen memory of vocabulary.

4.1.4 Summary of findings from student questionnaire

The responses to both closed questions in Part 1 and Part 2 and open questions in Part 3 of the questionnaire, therefore, indicate that the respondents favoured RL strategies and believed that they made greater use of it than the other 3 categories of MSs. In addition, both Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 demonstrate the same rank ordering of strategy types, with RL as the top rank followed by Reviewing, then the third one Creating mental linkages and finally Applying images & sounds. The responses to the open-ended questions indicated that the learners' beliefs about their using other MSs at the same time when they used RL strategies. Open-ended interview data will provide more specific information relating their beliefs about RL among Chinese EFL learners with Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHCs).

A factor analysis of the 12 items in Part 1 and the 28 items in Part 2 of the questionnaire suggest the subjects' beliefs about the current situation for Chinese EFL learners, reflecting traditional Chinese learning strategies. The results of factor analysis will be presented below:

4.1.5 Results of factor analysis

As Seliger & Shohamy state (1989:228): “Factor analysis helps the researcher make large sets of data more manageable by identifying a factor or factors that underlie the data”. In this study, the researcher’s aim in carrying out factor analysis was to see whether subsets of questionnaire items were correlated with each other to constitute an underlying component or a factor and, if so, how many different components or factors could be identified to allow the researcher to explain them in a meaningful way and understand what feature they represented as Chinese EFL learners.

The method of factor analysis is widely used by many researchers. However, there is also considerable debate over reliable ways of determining the factors. Everitt & Dunn (2001:287-288) have summarised the debate as follows:

Factor analysis has probably attracted more critical comment than any other statistical technique. Because the factor loadings are not uniquely determined by the basic factor model many statisticians have complained that by rotating factors investigators can arrive at the answer they are looking for. Indeed, Blackith and Reyment (1997) suggest that the method had persisted *precisely* because it does enable users to impose their preconceived ideas of the structure of the observed correlations. Other criticisms have centred on whether the concept of underlying, unobservable variables is an acceptable one or not. In psychology, postulating latent variables to explain the correlations between manifest variables may be reasonable - in other areas it may not be so acceptable.

Hills (1997) has gone so far as to suggest that factor analysis is not worth the time necessary to understand it and carry it out. And Chatfield and Collins (1980) recommend that factor analysis should not be used in most practical situations. Such criticisms go too far. Factor analysis is simply an additional, and at times very useful, tool for investigating particular features of the

structure of multivariate observations. Of course, like many models used in analysing data, the one used in factor analysis is likely to be only a very idealized approximation to the truth in the situations in which it is generally applied. Such an approximation may, however, prove a valuable starting point for further investigations.

The results obtained from the factor analysis in this study will be presented below. Before embarking on the presentation of the results, it should be stated that of the 40 items in the closed part of the questionnaire, the first 12 focused on the learners' beliefs about the value of MSs, while the remaining 28 items focused on learners' beliefs about their actual use of specific strategies. For this reason, the results from questions 1-12 and questions 13-40 will be reported separately.

4.1.5-(1) Results of factor analysis of responses to the beliefs about the value of MSs



Figure 4.1 Results of factor analysis of responses to the beliefs about the value of MSs

Figure 4.1 shows the scree plot, which provides the factor extracted. The results of the factor analysis identified only *one* factor with eigenvalue (7.98) greater than 1 which explained 66% of the total variance. Figure 4.1 indicates that each of the 12 items had significant loadings (above .57, see Table 4.3) on the one factor that was identified and thus each of them needed to be included in investigating Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about MSs. The researcher concluded, therefore, that all the 12 items contributed to some extent to the overall beliefs about MSs in vocabulary learning by the Chinese EFL learners. Because only one component was extracted, the solution cannot be rotated (see Kinnear & Gray 1999:362-371 for SPSS method).

Table 4.3 Statements of the factor of learners' beliefs about MSs

Number	statement	Factor Loadings
Item 7.	Organized material is easier to store in and retrieve from long-term memory.	.93
Item 9.	Semantic mapping is valuable for remembering more words.	.88
Item 4.	Word lists, charts or cards are very helpful in memorising words.	.86
Item 6.	Words should be acquired in context. (e.g. guessing, pick up naturally.)	.85
Item 11.	Reviewing often is very helpful.	.85
Item 12.	Structured reviewing is only useful before exams.	.85
Item 1.	Vocabulary should be learnt through repetition.	.85
Item 2.	Rote learning is an effective way to memorise words.	.84
Item 5.	The translation equivalents of Chinese and English are helpful when a new word appears.	.81
Item 3.	English words have fixed meanings.	.80
Item 8.	Words can be remembered very quickly by mentally picturing the Situation (e.g.the word <i>seagull</i> , a seagull flying in the sky).	.60
Item 10.	Keyword method should be used.	.57
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis 1 component extracted		

4.1.5-(2) Results of factor analysis of responses related to memory strategy usage

Six factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted from the responses to questions 13-40 of the questionnaire by performing a principal component factor analysis on correlations of the 28 items. Initially, nine factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted. Figure 4.2 gives a visual inspection of the scree plot, the nine factors accounted for approximately 76% of the total variance. However, three of these factors were excluded as the loadings were too small or too close to each other and it was hard to determine which factor they should belong to.

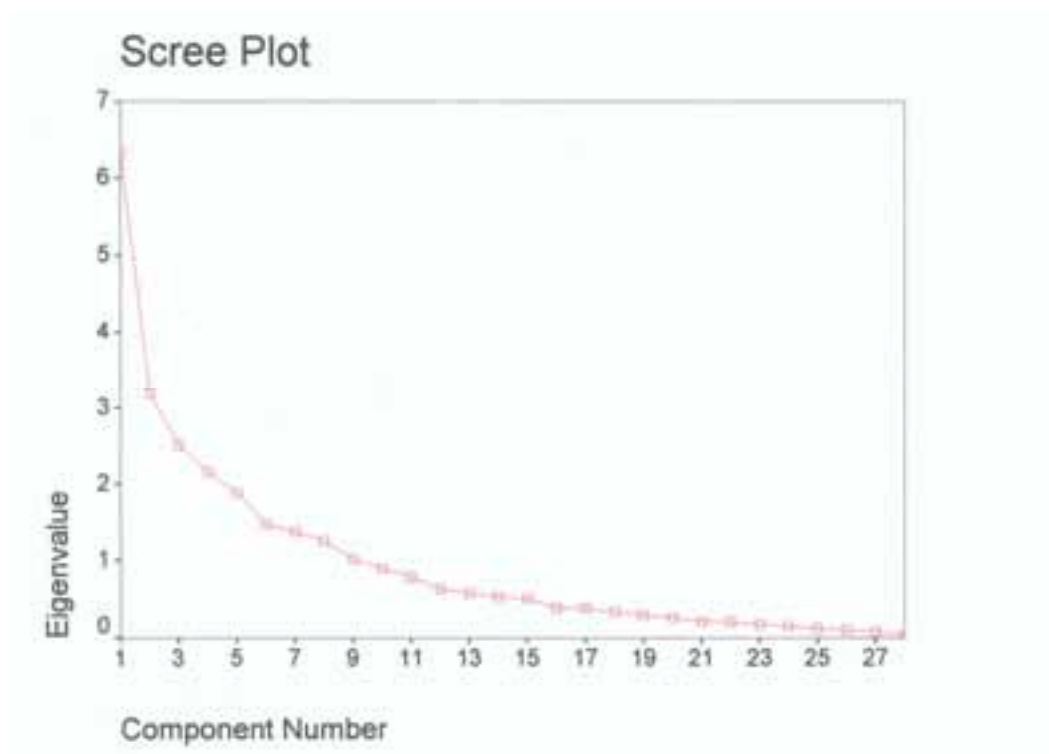


Figure 4.2 Results of factor analysis of responses related to memory strategy usage

Thus, a six-factor model produced the most interpretable factors. These six factors accounted for approximately 62.79% of the total variance (see Table 4.4). It should be stated here that only loadings of ≥ 0.40 or greater were included in this study (for

detailed information of the statements and factor loadings, see Appendix 7, which shows the component matrix containing the loadings of the 28 strategy items on the six factors extracted).

The six factors in Table 4.4 represented a slightly different variance except the first big one, yet the grouping indicated that they were all theoretically and practically meaningful to the present research. Overall, the six factors indicated beliefs about Chinese traditional orientation to learning strategies, reflecting the values of Confucian-heritage learning Culture as reviewed in Chapter Two. The six factors for the constitution of RL features in China are presented in Table 4.4. (For a detailed analysis of their implications, see Chapter 5.)

It should be stated here that the number of some items provided for each factor seemed limited, because items with loadings smaller than ± 0.40 were excluded from the factor analysis.

Rotation of the factors was attempted using the varimax criterion (see Kinnear & Gray 1999: 370-371). However, the procedure failed to converge in 25 iterations (convergence=1.095E-05). Therefore the researcher had to leave it unrotated. The purpose of rotation is not to change the number of factors extracted, but to try to arrive at a new position for the axes (factors) which is easier to interpret in psychological terms (Kinnear & Gray 1999: 370). Factor rotation is often regarded as controversial since it apparently allows the investigator to impose on the data whatever type of solution is required (Everitt & Dunn 2001:280). However, as rotation is simply a procedure which allows new axes to be chosen so that the positions of the points can be described as simply as possible, and in this study, the unrotated factors appear to have clear interpretations (see Appendix 6), no further

rotation methods were attempted. Table 4.4 presents the results of the factor analysis for items 13-40 of the questionnaire.

Table 4.4 Results of factor analysis of the use of memory strategy items

Factor	Description	Eigenvalue	% of variance
1	Active CHC-based memory strategies	6.34	22.64
2	Repetition with perseverance strategies	3.20	11.44
3	Repetition with association strategies	2.52	8.99
4	Memorisation through practice strategies	2.16	7.72
5	Exam-oriented memory strategies	1.89	6.75
6	Repetition to enhance better use of words strategies	1.47	5.25
	Total		62.79

CHC=Confucian heritage culture

Table 4.4 shows the results of factor analysis with labels to represent each factor. It is noticeable that Factor 1 covered all the features of Chinese EFL learners with CHC-based MSs as identified in the study, each of the other 5 factors reflected one aspect of CHC-based MSs, the contents of each factor will be discussed later.

Once a set of factor loadings or component weights has been found the next step is to try to interpret them in a way that gives a meaningful summary of the original data (Lawley & Maxwell 1971:66). The researcher was aware that the designation of factor labels might be problematic, as discussed at the outset of this section, as it seems to allow users to impose their preconceived ideas when labelling the identified factors. Thus, the results from the factor analysis should be interpreted with caution and expected to get only a close approximation to the truth. Factor analysis in this study was simply used as an additional, and very useful tool for summarising particular features of the structure which the data presented and interpreting them in

a meaningful way (Everitt & Dunn 2001). Each of the factors will now be discussed in turn.

Factor 1--Beliefs about active CHC-based memory strategies

Factor 1 reflected Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about their unique RL strategies with Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHCs) for learning and memorising vocabulary. Of the 16 items on Factor 1, 8 items (Items 15, 16, 19, 21, 22, 23, 27, 39) belonged to RL category with active repetition, not mere memorisation as main features in this study. Factor 1 also indicated features of other MSs that the subjects believed to use. Of the other 8 items referring to, 4 items (Items 28, 29, 32, 35) belonged to *Mental Linkages*, and 2 items belonged to each of *Applying Images & Sound*, and *Reviewing Well* (Items 30, 36 and Items 18, 25). Much more items including 4 MSs were loaded on Factor 1 in this study, which the researcher labelled as active CHC-based learning strategies. It reflects traditional Chinese learning strategies, that is, combination of repetition, memorisation, practice including reviewing and understanding as indicated in literature review. The belief about doing oral spelling exercises with classmates of similar level or recalling words by pair checking with someone else, (Items 21 & 25) which involved repetition, practice, mutual help and knowledge reviewing. This also indicated consistency with Greenaway's (2002) reviewing theory as a way of learning by keeping a diary, confiding with a friend, asking questions, or giving feedback. (Greenaway's theory will be discussed further in Chapter 5). Analysis of this factor, however, suggests that memory strategies aid in the storage and retrieval of information, and it is important to know that these strategies can be used in combination, and doing so may often help learners make

deeper, richer, more well-integrated, and therefore, more lasting links and associations (Poulshock 2002; Stevick 1982).

This factor, reflecting Chinese learners' beliefs about the use of all types of repetition and combination of MSs in EFL vocabulary learning, did serve to underline the features of active Confucian-based MSs. Taking these 16 items as a group, Factor 1 was labelled "Active CHC-based MSs".

Factor.2--Beliefs about repetition with perseverance strategies

This is the second largest factor with 8 items based on the data. This factor (Items 15, 17, 21, 23, 37, 38, 40, 26) indicated beliefs about repetition with perseverance with the implication of sustained effort, or deliberate effort to use Ridley's (1997) term, reflecting traditional Chinese cultural value as reviewed in Chapter Two. They believe that EFL words could be obtained and memorised in ways such as keeping lists; taking cards everywhere or doing vocabulary exercises repeatedly; grouping words by grammatical rules, making sure of the meanings for *accuracy of usage* as discussed in 1.1.1-2 (2), and using RL strategies consistently since they began to learn English.

Factor 3-- Beliefs about repetition with association strategies

This factor (Items 17, 19, 21, 26, 32, 34, 31) reflected Chinese EFL learners not only used a clear, systematic way of dealing with vocabulary, such as making a list of words and phrases, memorising grammar rules, grouping words into categories, but

could also associate similar sounds of words, read a series of texts on a related topic to enhance memorisation and understanding.

Factor 4-- Beliefs about memorisation through practice strategies

Four items (14, 24, 33, 34) loaded on Factor 4. Similarly as Factor 3, They indicated that the learners could develop methods of association to memorise words such as by breaking up words into components referring to word roots, prefixes or suffixes, memorising words by categorising into some specialized aspects such as animals, utensils, vegetables, etc., composing sentences with the words they were learning. They did not memorise words without understanding or thinking, but by understanding, thinking and organising and practising the words learnt, such as by going over the cards with the explanation, and using the words to make sentences for a better understanding and memorisation rather than mindless memorisation as perceived in the west (Biggs 1997, 1998).

Factor 5-- Beliefs about exam-oriented memory strategies

Four items (19, 23, 37, 38) related to the heavy pressure of exams for the learners. In order to succeed in the examination-driven educational system, the learners showed a preference for repetition methods, focusing their attention on completing vocabulary exercises repeatedly to meet the exam requirements, stressing the importance of reading aloud the vocabulary lists in strengthening the memory and relying on either a dictionary or a teacher to make sure of understanding the meanings for *accuracy*. The emphasis was on using the right words to answer questions, to ensure higher

marks in the exams. Sheorey (1999) describes these as examination-oriented MSs. This factor relates to responding to both exam pressure and exam requirements. Further information will be provided in Chapter 5.

Factor 6-- Beliefs about repetition to enhance better use of words strategies

Three items (20, 28, 33) loaded on Factor 6. This factor dealt with making sure that what was being studied through written practice, and memorising examples in context or components of words, was well understood, building confidence based on knowledge of the exact usage of expressions or phrases before using them.

Those factors presenting the features of Chinese EFL learners from Confucian heritage cultures (CHCs) seemed matched those identified in the review of literature in Chapter 2 (see 2.3.2-4). These learners prefer RL but are not passive RL learners. (See the content analysis based on interviews for more detailed information about the reason why Chinese EFL learners rely on RL). Further discussion relating these 6 factors and attainment on the vocabulary test will be provided later in 4.3.5.

4.2 Results of interviews

This section now will deal with the results of another instrument---interview. The interview consists of two parts, the results of which will be discussed separately.

4.2 1 Interview: Part 1. Triangulation of strategy of preferences

As discussed in Chapter 3 (see 3.6.7), the first part of the semi-structured interview was designed to confirm the information acquired from the questionnaire through *triangulation*. Part 1 of the questionnaire asked respondents to rate their agreement with each of 12 statements about MSs on a scale of 1 to 5. Part 1 of the interview presented a list of strategies based on the questionnaire statements (but reworded, and 10 not 12) but asked the respondents to place these in their own order of preference. Thus this part of the interview acted as a form of triangulation of the data collected with the questionnaire, by allowing the researcher to access relevant information in two different ways. The raw data for the preferred order of the 10 strategies is provided in the Appendices (see Appendix 6). The original order of the 10 strategies in the interview schedule are provided below (see Table 4.5). Each number in the parenthesis at the end of each strategy refers to the 4 different MSs. 1=Rote learning; 2=Mental linkages; 3=Images & sounds and 4=Reviewing.

Table 4.5 The original order of the ten strategy preferences listed in the interview schedule

1. Making up vocabulary cards/lists and memorising them are useful for both the learners at the initial stages and higher stages. (1)
2. Using Chinese equivalents in understanding English. (1)
3. Remembering a new word by a combination of sounds and images. (3)
4. Getting definitions from a dictionary for accuracy. (1)
5. Reading and writing words many times. (1)
6. Guessing the meanings of words in context. (2)
7. Remembering words by grouping into categories. (2)
8. Using keywords for memorisation. (3)
9. Using semantic mapping to enlarge vocabulary. (3)
10. Remembering words by reviewing often. (4)

Table 4.6 presents the responses to the rank-ordering of memory strategy preferences by the 100 subjects, using Condorcet's Method for calculating a majority decision (see 3.6.4).

Both the rows and columns in Table 4.6 correspond to the numbered MSs presented in the original list in the interview schedule. The table shows preferences for strategies on the horizontal axis over those on the vertical axis. For example, the number 65 in row 3, column 8 means that 65 subjects preferred strategy 3 to strategy 8. The results suggest that strategy 5 was preferred by a majority to all other strategies. Strategy 10 is preferred by a majority to all other strategies except No. 5. Strategy 3 is preferred by a majority to all other strategies except Nos. 5, and 10. Strategy 6 is preferred by a majority to all other strategies except Nos. 3, 5, and 10. Strategy 4 is preferred by a majority to all other strategies except Nos. 3, 5, 6, and 10. Strategy 8 is preferred by a majority to all other strategies except Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10. Strategy 1 is preferred by a majority to all other strategies except Nos. 3, 5, 6, 8, and 10. (It should be noted that there seems to be a minor problem with Strategy 8 and Strategy 1. They are preferred by a majority to all other strategies except 5 strategies each. However, the minor difference between the 5 numbers gives the distinction by average ranks, Strategy 8 with 5.61 and Strategy 1 with 5.86). Strategy 9 is preferred by a majority to all other strategies except Nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10. Strategy 2 is preferred by a majority to all other strategies except Nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10. A majority prefers every other strategy to Strategy 7. Thus, in this sense, the order from most popular to least popular is:

5, 10, 3, 6, 4, 8, 1, 9, 2, 7.

**Table 4.6 Responses to the rank-ordering data
(Part One of interview items 1-10)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	0	63	37	51	35	38	56	45	57	32
2	37	0	25	41	25	27	53	38	43	22
3	63	75	0	57	41	52	75	65	71	39
4	49	59	43	0	31	47	72	56	58	38
5	65	75	59	69	0	62	79	70	77	58
6	62	73	48	53	38	0	75	56	72	42
7	44	47	25	28	21	25	0	38	41	21
8	55	62	35	44	30	44	62	0	72	35
9	43	57	29	42	23	28	59	28	0	21
10	68	78	61	62	42	58	79	65	79	0

Table 4.7 presents respondents' preferred strategies in rank order on the basis of the data in Table 4.6.

Table 4.7 Rank orderings of the preferred MSs

Categories	Strategies	Rank
RL	5. Reading and writing words many times.	1
RW	10. Remembering words by reviewing often.	2
AIS	3. Remembering a new word by a combination of sounds and images.	3
CML	6. Guessing the meanings of words in context.	4
RL	4. Getting definitions from a dictionary for accuracy.	5
AIS	8. Using keywords for memorisation.	6
RL	1. Making up vocabulary cards/lists and memorising them are useful for both the learners at the initial stages and higher stages.	7
AIS	9. Using semantic mapping to enlarge vocabulary.	8
RL	2. Using Chinese equivalents in understanding English.	9
CML	7. Remembering words by grouping into categories.	10

RL, rote learning; RW, reviewing; AIS, applying images & sounds; CML, creating mental linkages

Of the 100 respondents who rated the 10 statements according to their preferences, RL with particular reference to Item 5 “Reading and writing words many times” was preferred predominantly and more respondents preferred to Item 10 Reviewing. Therefore, RL was ranked first and the second rank was *Reviewing*. The results appeared consistent with the results from the first two parts of questionnaire data as discussed above. However, Item 7 “Remembering words by grouping into categories” became the lowest rank referring to *Mental linkages* rather than *Applying images & sounds* as found in the previous data analysis of Parts 1 & 2 of the questionnaire through descriptive analysis discussed above. *RL* was also placed at the 5th, 7th and 9th position in the rank ordering. This seemed to suggest that there was not a very clear preference indicated here for specific types of strategies. However, the student interviews, in fact, show the subjects’ No. 1 preference for repetition as the main feature of *RL* and No. 2 preference for *Reviewing*, which was identified as one part of *RL* in this study. Thus, of the 4 MSs, *RL* and *Reviewing* were ranked as the first two preferred strategies as indicated from questionnaire data analysis. It also indicated the subjects’ more extended responses to their beliefs about the use of *RL*. The content analysis of subjects’ responses based on the open-ended interview questions will further confirm the results.

With Kendall’s coefficient of concordance, Kendall *W* is 0.1458. It could be concluded that the result is highly significant, as shown for Chi-square test:

$$\text{Chi-square}=131.22; \text{df}=9; p<0.001.$$

Thus, the results suggest that there is some agreement between learners about their preferred strategies.

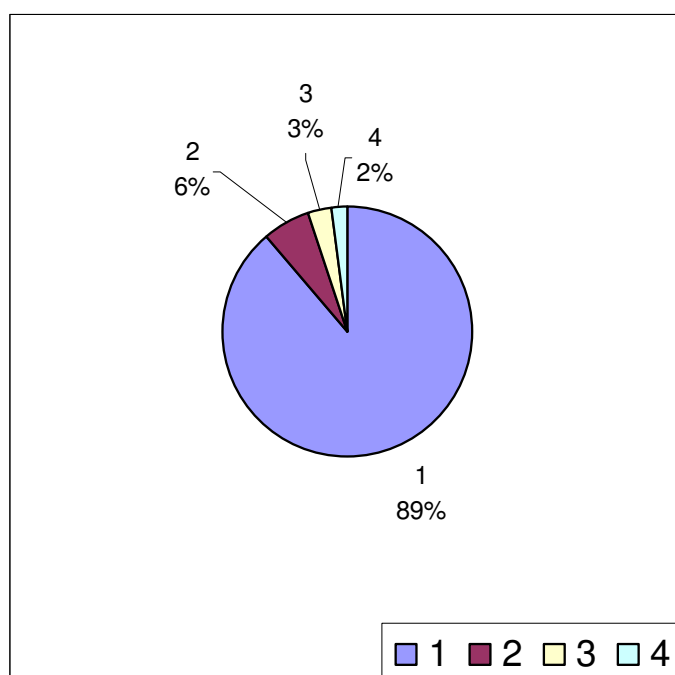
4.2.2 Interview: Part 2. Students' responses to open questions

For Part 2 of the semi-structured interview, the subjects were asked to answer 5 open-ended questions to elicit specific information of the subjects' beliefs about MSs with particular reference to RL for Chinese EFL learners in learning vocabulary. The questions in Part 2 were also designed to investigate information regarding the reasons why students preferred RL to other MSs. The responses to the open-ended part of the interview will be presented in turn.

Open question 1: Which vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) do you think Chinese learners use the most and why?

The pie-chart below was based on the responses to the first question in Part 2 of the interview about the most frequently used MSs in China and which the participants believed to be most helpful in vocabulary learning. As the figure shows, the pie-chart that RL strategies were believed to be used overwhelmingly (89%) in preference to the other 3 MSs.

Figure 4.3 Percentages of usage of the 4 memory strategies



1=Rote learning; 2= Reviewing; 3= Mental linkages; 4= Images & sounds

Open question 2: Have you ever thought about getting rid of rote learning if it is traditional? Why?

The second question in Part 2 of the interview was especially designed to elicit responses to test whether the subjects held positive beliefs about RL with Confucian cultural influence. The question brought more “Yes” (55%) than “No” (45%) responses.

It seems contradictory since the previous results indicate positive beliefs about RL. A further survey provided more detailed information about their beliefs. Actually, those 55% subjects who answered “yes” stated that they had to give up the idea of dispensing with RL in EFL vocabulary learning, because it was very hard to do away the traditional methods since they were so deep-rooted. Also, the benefits of RL can not be discounted. The “negative” responses came to support the use of RL in China

by stating that they failed to try new strategies for several reasons, such as, the EFL environment, the need for accuracy in exams, etc. The reasons will be summarised later in 4.2.3 based on content analysis. Therefore, the results suggest that traditional Chinese culture is deep-rooted and far-reaching. Chinese EFL learners rely on RL and there is a tendency for its continued reliance. Next the results of Factor Analysis will present the features of Chinese EFL learners in vocabulary learning.

Open question 3: Which kinds of strategies can help you personally become a better English learner?

The responses to this question were mostly “RL is better” (90%). 10% of the subjects agreed with the majority, but also revealed that “RL is helpful to get better scores than any other MSs.” “The words learnt through RL will be easily forgotten after exams unless it is reviewed very often”. Thus, the response to this question can be taken as *Fully support* and *Partially support* RL strategies. Content Analysis will provide more detailed information about it later.

Open question 4: What do you think of the relationship between rote learning and the other three large categories of memory strategies as mentioned previously?

The overwhelming majority of the subjects (99%) responded to this question by stating “essential stage for basic knowledge to advanced stages”; “If there are no RL strategies, there are none of the other MSs”; “I only can develop other strategies, such as guessing, on the basis of a large vocabulary obtained by rote learning”.

Open question 5: Which kinds of strategies do you think are all useful for learners at different levels of English?

While participants' responses to the interview questions generally showed a high level of support for RL strategies, the results of the content analysis based on the respondents' statements about the *role* of RL revealed some slightly different beliefs: "RL is always helpful whatever stage I reach in vocabulary learning." "RL is useful in all the stages of learning, but it seems more useful in the early stage". In the light of these differences, they were coded as **fully agree** (89%) and **partially agree** (11%), (see 4.2.3 for a full discussion of the content analysis).

4.2.3 Content analysis of interviews

The sources of data were discussed in the previous chapter. What follows are the content analysed results from the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews.

Individual student interviews were conducted to gather in depth information on the subjects' beliefs about the role of RL and the reasons for their use of RL in EFL vocabulary learning in China. The procedures employed to analyse the data from these interviews are discussed below.

4.2.3-(1) Content analysis procedure

The aim of data organisation was to render the data into a form that most effectively facilitates analysis. To back up the results from the questionnaires as discussed previously, the content analysis was developed to get as close as possible to the subjects' beliefs about RL with CHCs and to identify the factors which the subjects believed affected the choice of strategy for EFL vocabulary learning.

The researcher's use of content analysis was based largely upon the work of Wenden (1987), whose interview responses based on the subjects' statements were tape recorded, transcribed, and using categories which were pre-determined by the researcher to analyse the data.

In Wenden's study, the researcher identified learners' explicit beliefs about language learning as the area or "universe of content" that was to be analysed. Within this "universe of content", each individual statement about how best to learn English (the "theme", underpinning all the data) was analysed. Twelve explicit statements, representing learners' explicit beliefs, were identified, defined and categorised into three main groups--- (1) Learners who emphasised the importance of using the language; (2) Learners who emphasised the importance of learning the language; (3) Learners who stressed the importance of personal factors, on the basis of the general overall approach to language learning advocated by each of the 25 subjects. The approaches of three learners, representative of each group, were analysed to determine the possible relationship between learners' explicit beliefs and their approach to language learning. Differences in the characteristic approaches of three learners were described in terms of strategies, attending pattern, criteria used for evaluating the effectiveness of a language learning activity, and planning priorities. Six criteria were developed to identify different types of statements in relation to this theme. These were:

1. The themes were *generalisations* learners made about themselves, all language learners or about various aspects of language learning.

2. They were either used to *justify* why learners did what they did, or to *describe* on a more abstract level the *essence of an experience* or a learner's *characteristic approach*.
3. Sometimes they were *spontaneous contributions* on the part of the learner, or they were a *response to a probing question* by the interviewer (e.g. why?) checking for clarification or consistency.
4. They often appear in the following *verbal contexts*:
 - “I think...,” “...It is important to...” (statements of opinion)
 - “The best way to learn is...” (superlative or comparative statements)
 - “You have to...”(the imperative mode)
 - “...is...” (a definition about what it means to learn English)
 - “if..., then” (a hypothetical statement).
5. The statement might be expressed *recurringly* throughout the interview either using the same phraseology or restated in other words.
6. The statement might be *explained in great detail* and/or with a tone of conviction.

Another 6 criteria were developed to code the transcripts such as: strategy of communication; cognitive strategy; attending to feelings; attending to communication; theory and evaluative criteria in relation to the 3 different groups as listed above. The results were calculated by frequency and organised by category of three groups.

In the present study, the methods and procedures were similar to the content analysis developed by Wenden, but differed from hers in the following ways. Firstly, the “universe of content” which formed the basis for the analysis of the transcripts consisted of beliefs about the role of RL in EFL vocabulary learning rather than

English language learning in general. Secondly, the theme underpinning the data related to what respondents believed about the use of RL for EFL learners in China rather than how best to learn English, and four specific criteria rather than six were developed to categorise the respondents' statements in relation to this theme (see 4.2.3-2). (3) Thirdly, transcripts were coded in relation to 6 factors which impacted on respondents' preferences. These 6 factors (see below) were identified in the literature review (see Chapter 2) and also the outcome of the pilot study as reasons to explain the respondents' preferences for RL strategies in China (see 3.5.6-3).

1. Chinese educational/cultural background;
2. EFL environment;
3. Traditional habit;
4. National situation/examination demand;
5. Chinese linguistic background/the way of learning mother tongue and
6. Failure to try out "best" ways.

As with Wenden's research, the data analysis allowed the researcher to group respondents into 3 broad groups although in the final analysis, only 2 groups emerged (see next section, 4.2.3-2).

4.2.3-(2) Coding and grouping of data

The following criteria were developed to identify statements of beliefs relating to the chosen theme:

1. The statements were *generalisations* learners made about themselves, or about all EFL learners in China.
2. They were either used to *justify* why learners did what they did, or to *describe* a learner's *characteristic approach*.
3. They often appeared in the following *verbal contexts*:
 - “I think...,” “...It is important to...” (statements of opinion)
 - “I prefer...” (comparative statements)
 - “I have to...”(no other better choice)
 - “...is...” (a definition about what it means to use RL)
 - “I use RL, because...” (giving reasons)
4. The statement might be expressed *recurringly* throughout the interview either using the same phraseology or restated in other words.

The researcher looked for recurrent sets of theme and the reasons being described, including the link with the other aspects of the data analysis by identifying where these responses were supported elsewhere in the data. The aim was to identify words and phrases which would allow respondents to be categorised into one of the three groups: Group 1 for full support, Group 2 for partial support or Group 3 for non-support. Interestingly, only two large groups emerged which were identified as full RL-supporters and partial RL-supporters.

The following is an example of a coded transcript in which each response is analysed in relation to the six factors provided above and assigned to one of the three overall groups.

The speaker is a student at Stage 4, the advanced level in the English Department.

Q: Which vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) do you think Chinese learners use the most and why?

A: RL. There are several reasons such as our cultural values, habitual styles, heavy pressure of the exams for accuracy, English as a total foreign language, etc. [*Group 1, full RL-supporter; reasons as Chinese educational/cultural background; EFL environment; Traditional habit; National situation/examination demand. Results of descriptive analysis of Parts 1 & 2 of the questionnaire data (see 4.1.1 & 4.1.2); Condorcet's Method for calculating the responses to Part 1 of interview (see 4.2.1)*].

Q: Have you ever thought about getting rid of rote learning if it is traditional? Why?

A: Never. RL suits me. I think there must be some misunderstanding if anyone wants to get rid of it. The words learnt by rote can strengthen my memory and deepen my understanding as well. [*Group 1, full RL-supporter; suggesting the definition of RL with memorising and understanding; Responses to Question 2 in Part 3 of questionnaire (see 4.1.3); Results of a factor analysis of Part 2 of questionnaire (see 4.1.5-2)*].

Q: Which kinds of strategies can help you personally become a better English learner?

A: I think it should be RL, because it is helpful to get exact answers for the high marks in the exams. It will affect my results if I give up RL. [*Group 1, full RL-supporter; the requirements of exams; Results of Chi-square analysis for the association between beliefs and test scores (see 4.3.4); Responses to Question 1 in Part 3 of questionnaire (see 4.1.3)*].

Q: What do you think of the relationship between rote learning and the other three large categories of memory strategies as mentioned previously?

A: RL plays the role of basis to get knowledge on which other memory strategies can be developed. Actually, I do not only use RL, but also other strategies, for example, reading from the contexts, doing exercises with my classmates. (*Group 1, full RL-supporter; suggesting RL is one of the strategies they believe to employ*).

Q: Which kinds of strategies do you think are all useful for learners at different levels of English?

A: Of course, RL. I use RL from the very beginning of learning EFL and now I am in Year 4, RL is still being used although obviously some other memory strategies are more used. (*Group 2, partial RL-supporter; suggesting RL may be more helpful for beginners than for advanced learners*).

From the 100 subjects' responses for each question in the interview, the researcher derived 18 broad statements summarising the respondents' beliefs about the role of RL with CHCs for Chinese EFL learners. The initial intention was to derive these broad statements into 3 overall groups as mentioned above (full RL-supporters; partial RL-supporters and non RL-supporters) but only the first two groups emerged and identified in this study. These are represented in Table 4.8 below. It should be noted here that the statements are presented as contrasting pairs related to specific beliefs for and against the use of RL. Beliefs by frequency in the table were placed just according to the sequence of subjects' interview responses rather than being put in ascending or descending order.

Table 4.8 Beliefs about the role of RL by frequency

Group 1 (Full RL-supporter)	Frequency of statement	Group 2 (Partial RL-supporter)	Frequency of statement
1. Chinese cultural values	71	10. Too old fashioned	29
2. Easy, simple and effective	89	11. Waste of time/more likely to forget	11
3. Helpful all the time	89	12. Useful for the beginners, not advanced learners	11
4. Important as a basis to develop advanced methods	99	13. Not very important for developing other methods	1
5. Always keep it	45	14. Try to do away with (Have to use it)	55
6. Only way for accuracy	90	15. No use after exams	10
7. The most effective way	88	16. May not be very effective	12
8. One of the ways for learning (But a crucial way)	97	17. One of the ways for learning (But not very important)	3
9. Benefit of the Chinese language	61	18. Disadvantages of EFL environment	39

n = 100

The results will be discussed in detail, and illustrated with examples from interview transcripts in Chapter 5. An analysis of each of the 18 statements is given below.

Group 1: Full RL-supporters

1. *Chinese cultural values.* This statement meant that RL should be regarded as China's Confucian cultural values of over two thousand years.
2. *Easy, simple and effective.* This second statement stresses the benefit of using RL strategies in EFL vocabulary learning and memorising.
3. *Helpful all the time.* This statement also emphasizes the benefit of RL and the learners would like to use it from the initial stage to the advanced stages of learning.
4. *Important as a basis to develop advanced methods.* Learners who made this statement considered RL fundamental to developing other MSs, as they believed that RL could convey basic essential knowledge.
5. *Always keep it.* This statement stressed the need for using RL and never thought of getting rid of it. However, only 45 learners appeared as stalwart supporters while 55 would like to abandon it (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of this point).
6. *Only way for accuracy.* The learners overwhelmingly believed (90%) that RL could better help to obtain accuracy of knowledge than other MSs and assure of high scores in exams.
7. *The most effective way.* The learners believed that RL strategies could benefit them most among all the MSs and could produce a desired result in EFL vocabulary learning. They also expressed that RL was used not only for memorising, but also for understanding and consolidating the knowledge they had learnt. This indicated the deeper concept of RL among Chinese than western learners.

8. *One of the ways for learning (But a crucial way).* This statement indicated that the learners not only used RL but also other MSs. However, they believed that the use of RL was more important than the other MSs.

9. *Benefit of the Chinese language.* The learners identified the advantages of RL from the influence of learning mother tongue in learning EFL vocabulary.

Group 2: partial RL-supporters

The themes in Group 2 were defined in contrast with those in Group 1.

10. *Too old fashioned.* The learners did not strongly object to RL, but considered the passive learning features, tracing back to ancient China. They did not wish to undervalue the unique and special culture in the world, but advocated changes or development.

11. *Waste of time/more likely to forget.* For the 11 subjects, this statement meant that repetition would take too much of their time and the knowledge learnt by rote might become vague after a period of time.

12. *Useful for the beginners, not advanced learners.* This statement showed that the use of RL benefited the learners more in the initial stages than in the higher stages, which was consistent with the findings identified in the literature review.

13. *Not very important for developing other methods.* This statement just expressed disagreement to No.4. *“Important as a basis to develop advanced methods.”* The subjects who held such a belief did not mean against the role of RL which was used for acquiring basic knowledge for advanced methods, they just did not believe that is so important in using any other learning strategies.

14. *Try to do away with (have to use it)*. This was the only result from the interview to show the negative beliefs about RL from the majority of subjects. However, they also reported the difficulty of doing away with it due to several reasons such as the requirement of exams, EFL environment, traditional habit, etc. They had to keep it.

15. *No use after exams*. This statement showed the concerns with the educational system in China. They believed that RL was more useful for exams than in real life.

16. *May not be very effective*. This statement listed here as contrasted to the report of No.7. The learners who made this statement did not completely believe that RL was the most effective way in EFL vocabulary learning. They also believed that other MSs could play the same role.

17. *One of the ways for learning (but not very important)*. The learners agreed that RL was one of the ways for learning EFL vocabulary, but they also used many other strategies which enabled them to get the same results.

18. *Disadvantages of EFL environment*. The subjects who made this statement believed that the Chinese language as a first language in China would get in the way of their learning and using English. A number of concerns regarding the influence of the way of learning the Chinese language on the way of learning English were also expressed. More detailed information will be provided in Chapter 5.

In general, the responses from the content analysis highlighted positive beliefs about the role of RL in EFL vocabulary learning in China. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5. Six general factors emerged from the responses of the interviews, which may contribute directly to the popularity of RL among Chinese EFL learners in China and a continued reliance on it. The factors will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

4.3 Results of the vocabulary test

The vocabulary test was actually designed, not to see the subjects' language proficiency, but to divide the subjects into three groups by their scores---“high achievers”, “borderline” and “low achievers” and then use chi-square analysis to see if there was a significant association between the variables: *beliefs* and *scores*.

The results of the test will be presented in the following five steps:

4.3.1 Results of the test by stage

The full score was 100 from the 100 questions. It should be noted here that initially the scores were divided into two groups with a score of 60% as a dividing line. According to traditional Chinese scoring criteria, the subjects who had scored less than 60% in the test were considered to have “failed”, while those who scored 60% or more have “passed”. However, as the researcher recognised that a pass mark of 60% might be considered arbitrary (see 4.3.2).

The mean score was 62.06% (SD 16.72), which indicates that the test was not difficult for the participants (although, as will be seen from Figure 4.4 below, participants at Stage 1 got poorest results in comparison with those at the other three higher stages). Figure 4.4 illustrates the scores of the test by stage based on a passing mark of 60%. Of the total 100 subjects, 65% met the required standard and 35% failed to meet the required standard. The difference in scores by stage was: Of the 25 subjects in Stage 1, only 5 gained a mark of 60% or above; of the 25 subjects in Stage 2, 15 gained a mark of 60% or above; of the 25 subjects in Stage 3, 22 gained a mark of 60% or above; of the 25 subjects in Stage 4, 23 gained a mark of 60% or above. Thus, although the vocabulary test paper was designed based on the 6,000

word vocabulary list, which was familiar to all the participants, the students in higher stages got better scores than the ones in lower stages. This is to be expected (see 3.4.4-1) as the students in higher stages just simply got longer time to familiarize themselves with the word list.

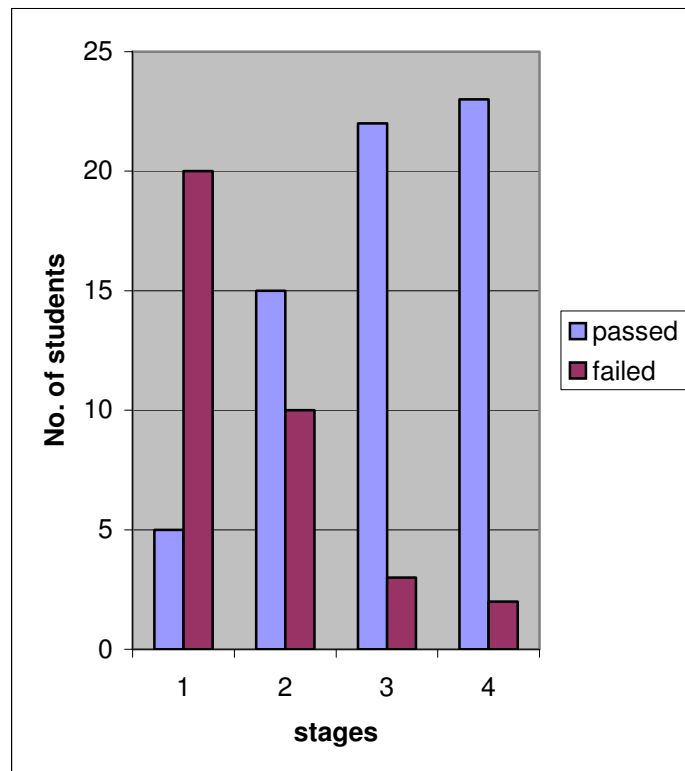


Figure 4.4 Scores of the test by stage

4.3.2 Division of scores into three groups

In order to avoid that the 60% cut-off is arbitrary, as the bifurcation into passed/failed groups may not be meaningful with only a few marks to separate group members, respondents were divided into three groups: high achievers, borderline and low achievers. This allowed a clear distinction to be made between high and low

achievers for purposes of comparison. The mean and median by which these groups were calculated are shown in Table 4.9 and Figure 4.5.

Table 4.9 Descriptive statistics for the test scores

SCORES

N	Valid	100
	Missing	0
Mean		62.06
Median		64.50
Mode		60
Std. Deviation		16.72
Range		69
Minimum		25
Maximum		94
Sum		6206
Percentiles	25	47.25
	50	64.50
	75	73.00
	90	84.00

Table 4.9 presents a standard deviation (SD) of 16.72, which can be rounded to 17. However, as can be seen in Figure 4.5, the scores are not normally distributed. As the distribution is unsymmetrical, therefore, it would be inappropriate to get the proportions to cut off by one SD *below* the mean and one SD *above* the mean (Clegg 1982). Moreover, the “borderline” group created by this method would be too large ($62+17=79$ and $62-17=45$) as 65 subjects gained scores between 45 and 79. In order to get a more appropriate proportion, the division was just simply done by the median 64.50 which was rounded off to 65, with 10 marks on either side. In this way,

three groups appeared: borderline (between 55% and 75%); high achievers (above 75%); and low achievers (below 55%). When categorised in this way, 44 subjects belonged to the borderline group (between 55% and 75%); 21 to the high achieving group (above 75%); and 35 to the low achieving group (below 55%). (For detailed test scores, see Appendices 8 & 9). Figure 4.5 presents the three different groups. It should be noted here that the vocabulary test results suggest no scores between 54 and 60.

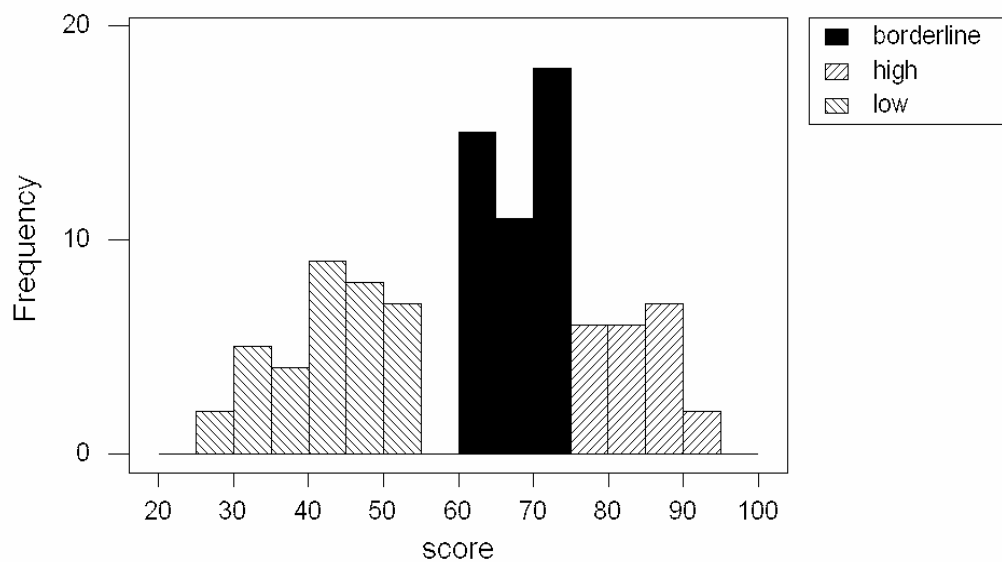


Figure 4.5 Three different groups by test scores

4.3.3 Analysis of test results by gender

Initially, it was not the intention to investigate gender differences in test scores because of the unbalanced number of males and females in the sample, as noted in

Chapter Three (see 3.1.2-2). However, a descriptive analysis of test results by gender does show some differences. See Table 4.10 and Figure 4.6 below:

Table 4.10 Descriptive statistics of gender difference
gender

Case Processing Summary

gender	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
SCORES female	76	100.0%	0	.0%	76	100.0%
male	24	100.0%	0	.0%	24	100.0%

Descriptives

gender			Statistic	Std. Error	
SCORES	female	Mean	61.39	1.98	
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
		Lower Bound	57.44		
		Upper Bound	65.34		
		5% Trimmed Mean	61.69		
		Median	64.50		
		Variance	298.829		
		Std. Deviation	17.29		
		Minimum	25		
		Maximum	94		
		Range	69		
		Interquartile Range	26.00		
		Skewness	-.284		.276
		Kurtosis	-.848		.545
male	male	Mean	64.17	3.04	
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
		Lower Bound	57.87		
		Upper Bound	70.46		
		5% Trimmed Mean	64.28		
		Median	65.50		
		Variance	222.406		
		Std. Deviation	14.91		
		Minimum	35		
		Maximum	91		
		Range	56		
		Interquartile Range	18.75		
		Skewness	-.157		.472
		Kurtosis	-.494		.918

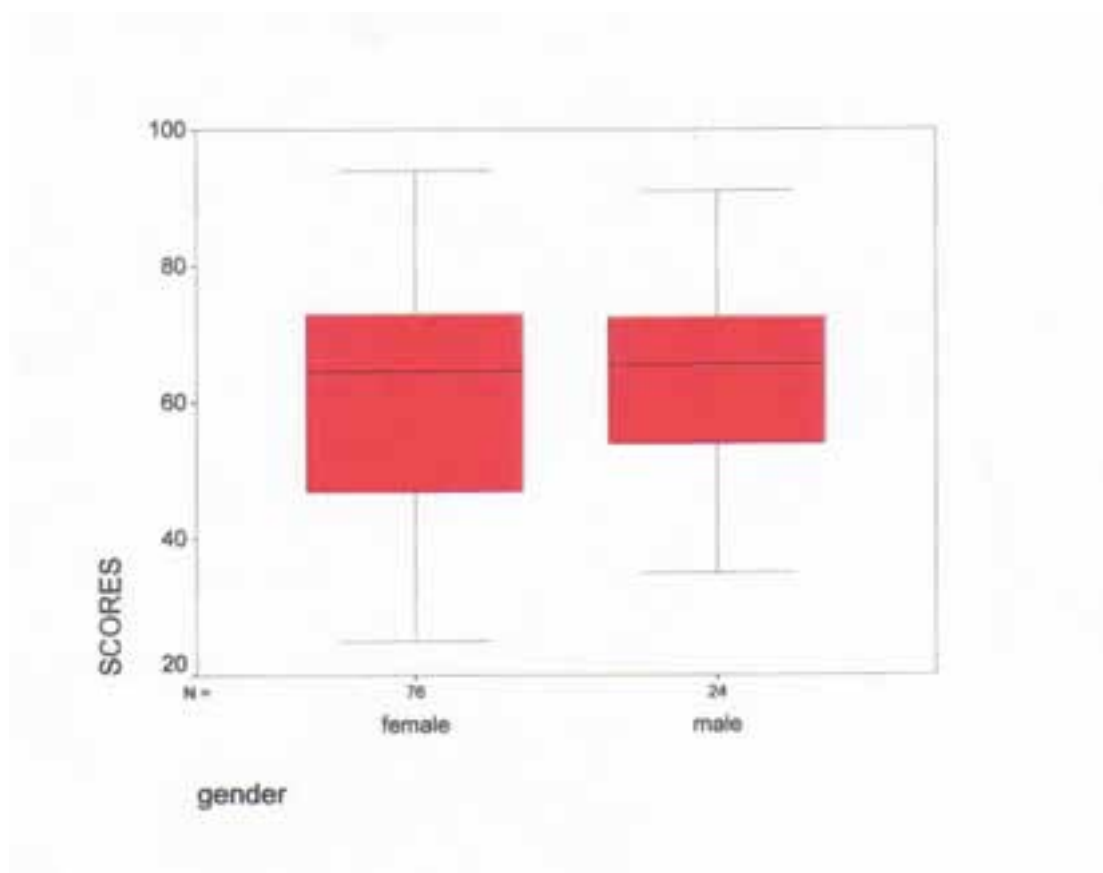


Figure 4.6 Boxplots of scores categorised by gender

Table 4.10 shows the descriptive statistics of scores for males and females. (For more detailed information, see Appendix 10). According to the means, the male group (mean score 64.17) slightly outperformed the female group (mean score 61.39). Figure 4.6 shows boxplots of the male and female subjects' scores plotted side-by-side, for comparison. The box itself represents that portion of the distribution falling between the 25th and 75th percentiles, i.e. the *lower* and *upper quartiles*. 50% of the scores lie between the 25th and 75th percentiles for both female and male groups. The thick horizontal line across the interior of the box represents the median (male: 65.50; female: 64.50). The vertical lines outside the box, which are known as whiskers, connect the largest and smallest values (female: 94 to 25; male: 91 to 35).

A t-test was used to ascertain whether there was a significant difference between the two mean scores (Kinnear & Gray 1999:153). The results of the t-test are as follows:

$$t = -.706; df = 98; NS$$

This shows that there is no significant difference between the males and females in this study.

In this study, it proved hard to analyse gender differences vis-à-vis beliefs about RL because of the small numbers of males in the high achieving and low achieving groups. Only 4 of the 21 high achievers and 7 of the 35 low achievers were males. Thus, 17 of the 21 high achievers and 28 of the 35 low achievers were females. In the borderline group, there were 13 males and 31 females. Furthermore, the interview data suggested that all the males in this study, whether they were high achievers, low achievers or borderline, expressed full RL support. As there were no significant differences between the male subjects' strategy choices, there appears to be no correlation between the male subjects' strategy choices and their vocabulary test achievements. The researcher recognises that the difficulty of correlating strategy choice and test results with gender is a limitation of this study. With a more balanced subject group, it would be possible to investigate whether there were any significant differences in the choice of strategies between males and females, and whether this affects their English language proficiency. This would also be helpful for teachers or researchers seeking to better understand Chinese EFL learners and wishing to discern which strategies are more relevant to their styles, tasks and goals. However, some significant research has already been carried out in this area (e.g. Oxford 1994;

Sheorey 1999). In many studies, females reported a greater overall strategy use than males (although sometimes males surpassed females in the use of a particular strategy) Based on informal discussions among Chinese language teachers and students, the common perceptions about Chinese learners used to be that females were more likely to use RL than males. In this study, however, all the males' beliefs placed them in the full RL-support group, whereas the females' beliefs fell into both full RL-support and partial RL-support groups Tables 4.11 and 4.12 below provide the differences between the subjects' beliefs and their test results by gender:

Table 4.11: No. of male subjects' beliefs and their test scores

Group	Test results		Total
	High achievers	Low achievers	
Full RL-supporters	4	7	11
Partial RL-supporters	0	0	0
Total	4	7	11

Table 4.12: No. of female subjects' beliefs and their test scores

Group	Test results		Total
	High achievers	Low achievers	
Full RL-supporters	14	9	23
Partial RL-supporters	3	19	22
Total	17	28	45

Although the tables above did show the differences between the subjects' beliefs and their test results by gender, the small number of males showed a clear imbalance and

created difficulty in gathering clear information and data about gender factors in relation to RL.

However, the main purpose of this study was to set out to investigate the beliefs about memory strategies with the predominant features of RL used by the Chinese EFL learners, not to study the specific strategy used by gender. This perspective has to be left for future research.

4.3.4 Results of Chi-square analysis

Based on the EFL vocabulary test results from those who were classified into “high achievers,” “borderline” and “low achievers” groups as discussed in the previous section, two of the groups were chosen “high achievers,” and “low achievers” for comparison, making a total of 56 subjects for this part of analysis. Following the discussion in Section 4.2, the borderline group was not relevant to this analysis to avoid the *arbitrary*. Based on the subjects’ responses to questionnaire and interview items, these respondents were then divided into two groups, which were coded as **full RL-supporters**, who were those subjects who gave 100% support to using RL strategies in vocabulary learning, and **partial RL-supporters**, who were those subjects who did not give 100% support to RL (The reasons for this will be discussed in Chapter Five.) The data did not offer a third group for **non-RL supporters**, as there were no subjects who stated that they were not at all in support of RL strategies and there were no subjects who stated that they did not use RL strategies at all. Therefore the Chi-square analysis only focuses on the relationship between full RL-support and test results and partial RL-support and test results. Table 4.9 presents the raw data in relation to these two groups. The researcher aimed to discover whether

there was any significant association between subjects' beliefs about RL and their learning achievements. The Chi-square analysis was conducted to determine whether there was any significant difference between the subjects who fully believed in using RL strategies and who partially believed in using RL vis-à-vis their test results.

From inspection of this 2x2 contingency table (Table 4.13), it is clear that there is an association between the Belief Group and Test Result variables: a higher proportion of the Full-RL-supporters did, in fact, gain higher scores in the test; whereas the majority of the Partial RL-supporters get lower scores. Chi-square analysis was used to determine that the observed differences were significant ($p < .01$).

Table 4.13 A contingency table of beliefs and test scores in the high achieving and low achieving groups

Group	Test results		Total
	High achievers	Low achievers	
Full RL-supporters	18	16	34
Partial RL-supporters	3	19	22
Total	21	35	56

It can be concluded that there was a significant association between the variables *beliefs* and *scores*, as shown by the p -value=.003 (much smaller than 0.01) for Chi-square. See the results below:

$$\text{Chi-square}=8.804; \text{df}=1; p<0.01.$$

Next section will look at the results from comparison of attainment on the vocabulary test by the different factors obtained from Factor Analysis (see 4.1.5-2).

4.3.5 Relationship between factors from the factor analysis and the test results

The results are presented by plotting the data onto a scattergraph to see if it indicates a relationship between the two variables: vocabulary test scores and the value of each of the 6 factors for the 100 student subjects.

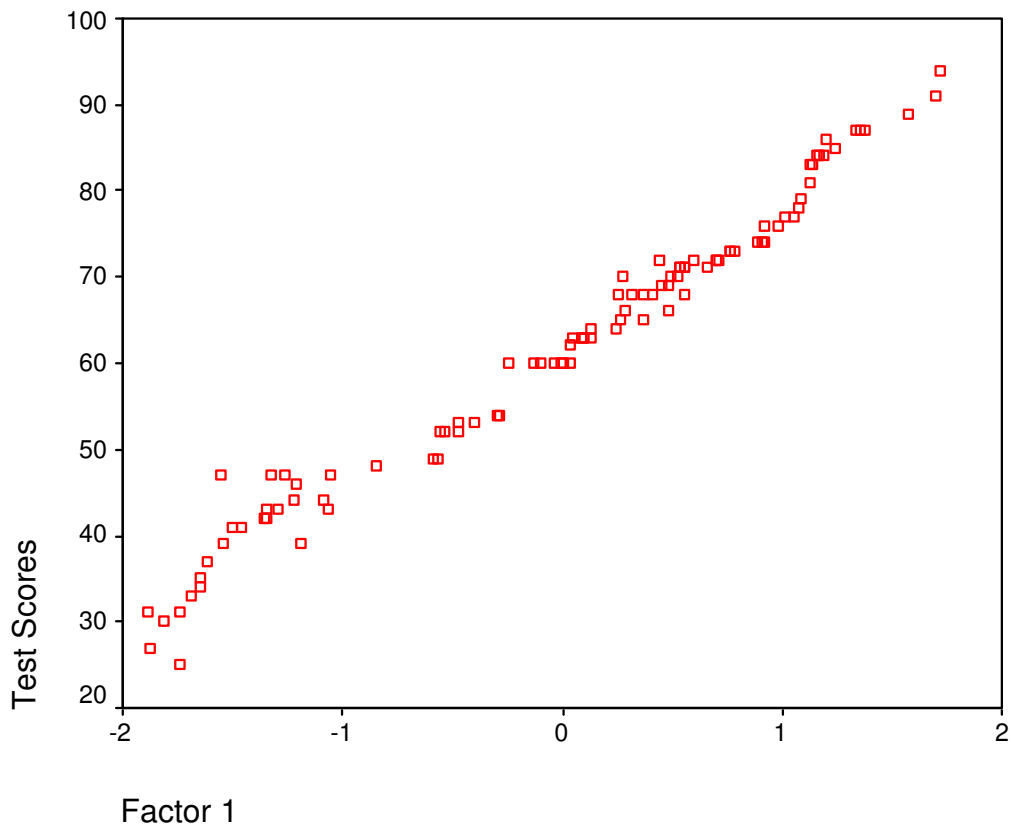


Figure 4.7 Relationship between test scores and Factor 1

Figure 4.7 shows that a positive correlation between the variables is achieved. In this case, since the general trend is for an increase in test score associated with an increase in the value of Factor 1 labelled as active CHC-based MSs, a positive

relationship exists (Bell 1993). Thus, there appears to be a very strong relationship. Further discussion will be provided later in this section.

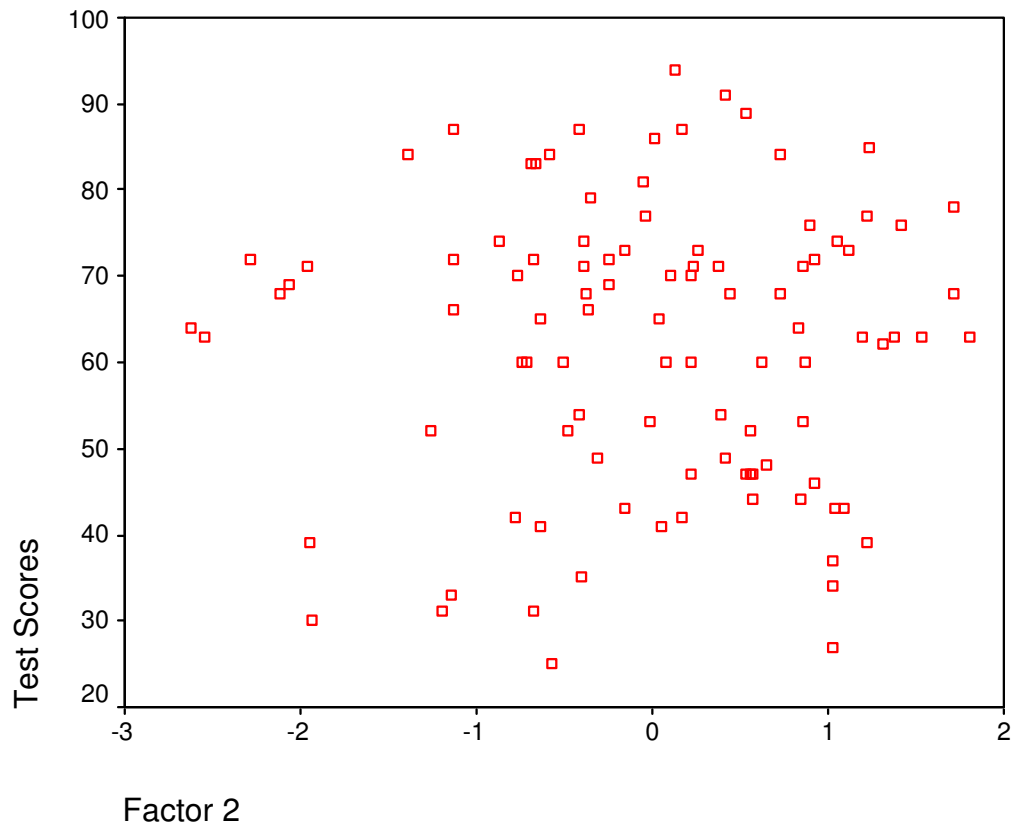


Figure 4.8 Relationship between test scores and Factor 2

The resulting figure (Figure 4.8) indicates the random scatter of results, with no discernible pattern. Therefore, it is assumed that there is little or no relationship between variables—test score and the value of Factor 2 labelled as Repetition with perseverance strategies.

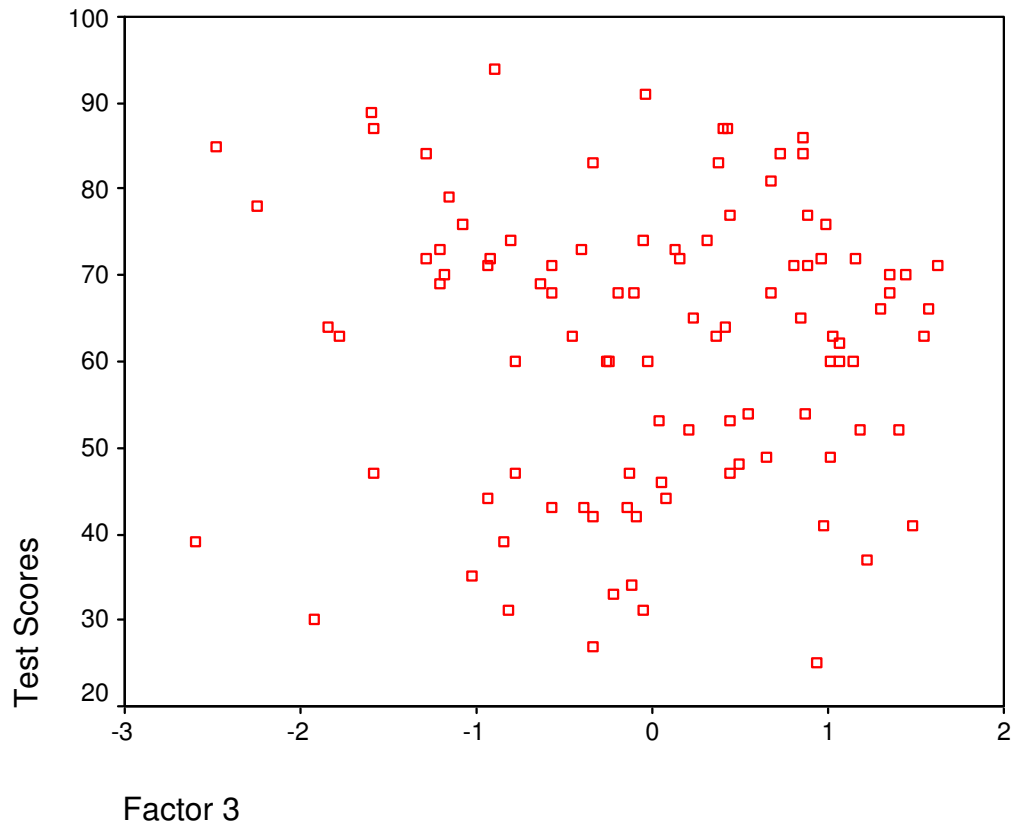


Figure 4.9 Relationship between test scores and Factor 3

The resulting figure (Figure 4.9) shows that there is no relationship between test score and the value of Factor 3 labelled as Repetition with association strategies, because of the random scatter of results, which indicates the same result as in Figure 4.8.

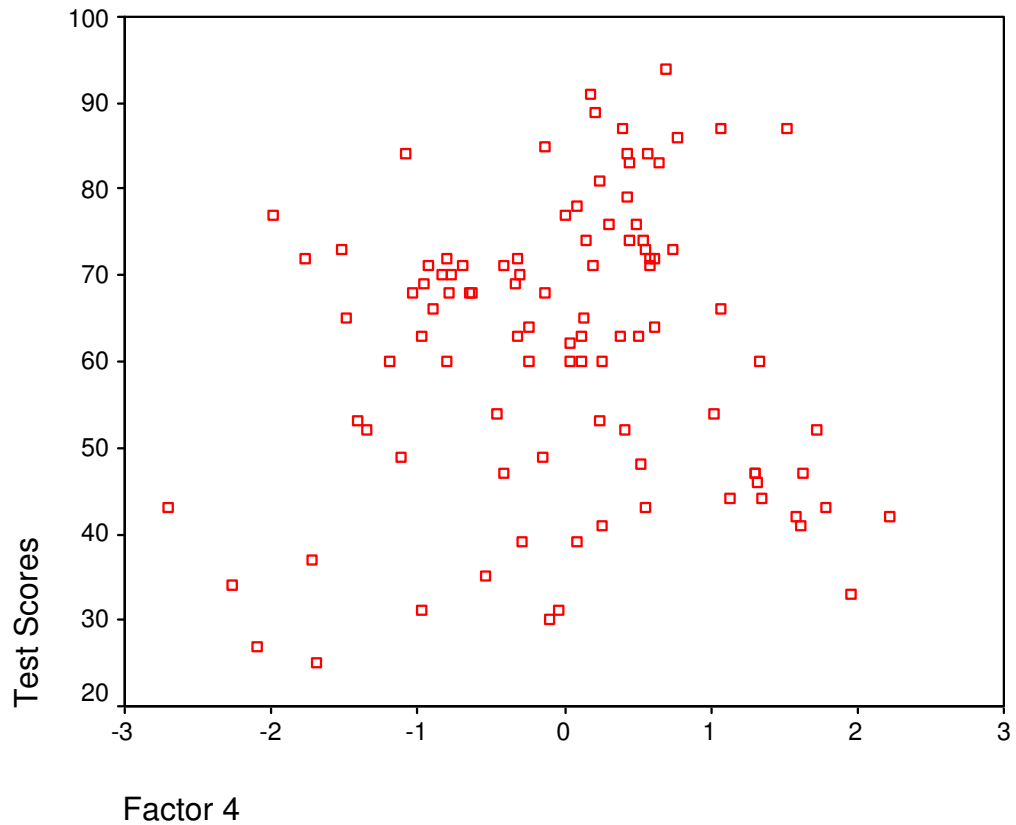


Figure 4.10 Relationship between test scores and Factor 4

Figure 4.10 illustrates a better scatter of results than in Figure 4.8 and Figure 4.9. However, the scattergraph does not suggest relationship between variables—test score and the value of Factor 4 labelled as Memorisation through practice strategies.

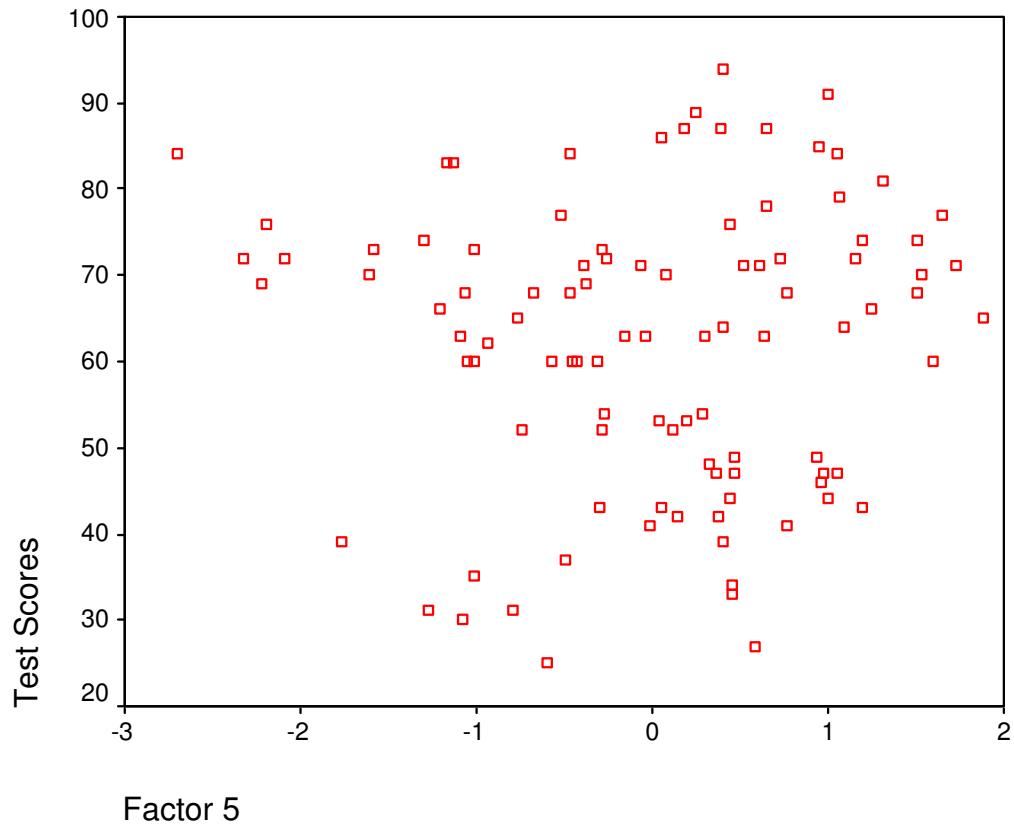


Figure 4.11 Relationship between test scores and Factor 5

The resulting figure (Figure 4.11) shows that there is no relationship between test score and the value of Factor 5 labelled as Exam-oriented memory strategies, because of the random scatter of results, with no discernible pattern.

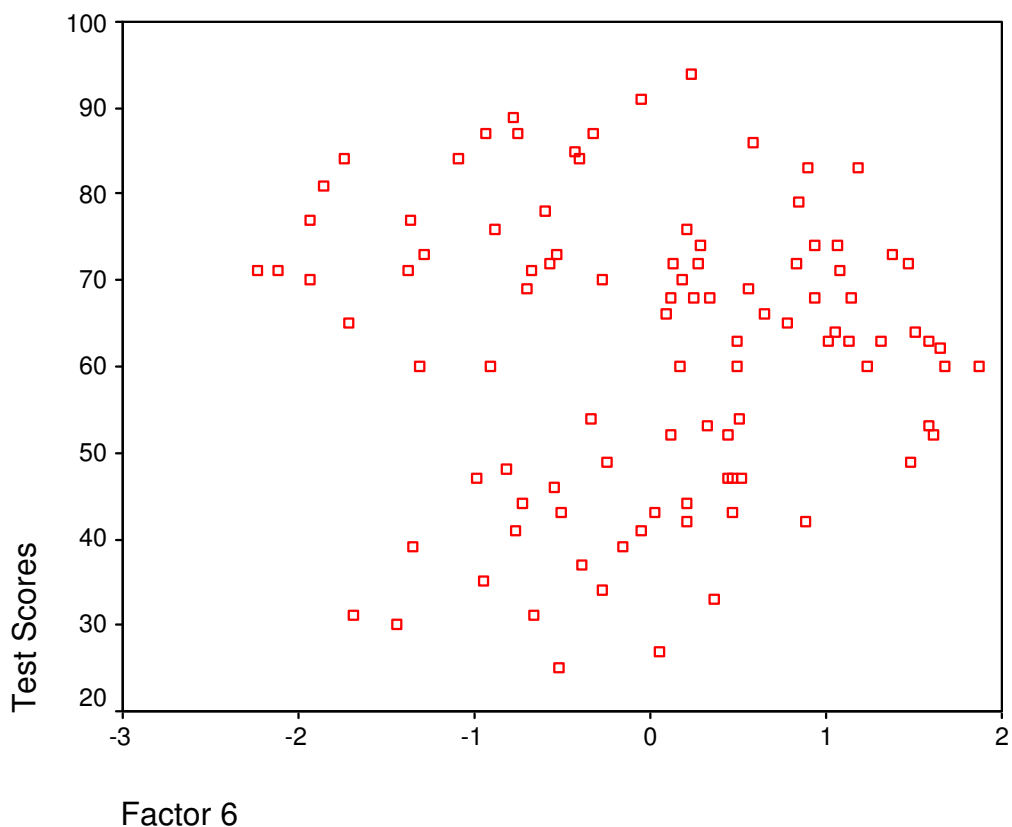


Figure 4.12 Relationship between test scores and Factor 6

Figure 4.12 indicates no relationship between test score and the value of Factor 6 labelled as Repetition to enhance use of words, because of the random scatter of results, with no discernible pattern.

Of the six scattergraphs, only Figure 4.7, the variables between test scores and Factor 1, shows a strong relationship. This did not affect data analysis, because Factor 1 is composed of much more items than any other 5 factors, including all the features as the Chinese EFL learners' believe they have in learning vocabulary, which reflect their beliefs about active CHC-based memory strategies (see 4.1.5-2 Factor 1). The non-significant association between the variables test scores and each of the other 5

factors (Factor 2-Factor 6) indicates that each of the other 5 factors has reflected only one aspect of Confucian-based MSs as learners believe to have used. What the results suggest is that Chinese EFL learners with CHCs have a strong belief about the use of a combination of Confucian-based MSs rather than any of the narrowly used MSs.

4.4 Results of teacher questionnaire

As suggested by Seliger & Shohamy (1989:123), “The use of a variety of methods to collect data allows the researcher to validate findings through triangulation....Use of the process increases the reliability of the conclusions reached”. In collecting second language data, some qualitative researchers use video or audio tapes to confirm the data from observation or manual transcription by asking other judges to evaluate the tapes (e.g.Oliver 2001). However, this is not the sort of *triangulation* used by the researcher in this study.

In the present study, once the initial conclusions had been identified in the data, the researcher wanted to ascertain the generalisability of the findings. For this purpose, a questionnaire with five large questions based on the research results was used to elicit Chinese EFL teachers’ views on students’ preferred MSs. As noted in Chapter Three, confirming findings through a questionnaire to Chinese EFL teachers was as an additional exploratory step in this study, and served as a form of triangulation. Although the five open questions in the EFL teachers’ questionnaire were provided in Chapter Three, they are listed here again for convenience.

1.Chinese EFL learners are believed to use more rote learning than any other memory strategies. Is it true? Why?

2. Rote learning suits Chinese learners best to memorise vocabulary. What do you think?
3. Rote learning works better than other memory strategies in China. Do you agree?
4. Rote learning is effective in vocabulary learning and it is helpful for all the learners at all stages---from beginners to the advanced learners. Please comment on it.
5. Would you please talk about your attitudes towards rote learning for Chinese EFL learners in China? Examples/evidence are preferable.

The results from each question were calculated based on the replies from 42 teachers from the 42 questionnaires returned in time for analysis. The responses were coded as **Agree**, **Disagree** and **Others** to all the 5 questions. Question 5 did not seem to invite an “agree” or “disagree” response. However, the teachers’ statements focused on their beliefs whether RL suits Chinese EFL learners which were consistent with the students’ statements, leading to a form of “agree” or “disagree” response. These are presented in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14 Results of the responses from EFL teachers

Questions	Agree		Disagree		Others (partially agree)	
	(No.)	(%)	(No.)	(%)	(No.)	(%)
Q1	31	74%	6	14%	5	12%
Q2	19	45%	8	19%	15	36%
Q3	11	26%	21	50%	10	24%
Q4	17	40%	2	5%	23	55%
Q5	20	48%	5	12%	17	40%

n = 42

From the data in Table 4.14, generally, the results of Questions 1, 2, 4 and 5 appeared more positive than negative except question 3, (Rote learning works better than other memory strategies in China. Do you agree?), which received more negative than positive responses.

The reasons provided by the teachers were generally the same as the initial results, which were derived from the same procedure as for content analysis of interviews. As to Question 3, examples of reasons given for the negative responses were:

1. Besides RL, words can be remembered in other ways such as reading novels, learning songs, playing games, using in daily life, so more words can be learned at an advanced level.
2. Too much memorisation takes away the fun and the memory won't last long.
3. It is hard to say if RL works better than other memory strategies, for other methods are also very successful.
4. With China's door wider open to the West, more communicative strategies should be used.

The above answers indicated that the EFL teachers did not fully have negative beliefs. According to their explanations, RL still remained the most useful strategy at the beginning of learning, but they implied that other MSs should not be neglected.

In sum, teachers' perception about the findings provided:

An additional insight into the researcher's initial conclusions about the data.

The responses from teacher questionnaire showed some evidence of *generalisability* to learners elsewhere in China. It can be said to be valid in relation to the participants in this particular research. Different perspectives indicating teachers' expectations about the future of EFL learning/teaching were revealed, which will be discussed in Chapter 6 for implications.

4.5 Summary of the results

A summary of results in relation to each research question is presented below. These will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

The first research question was intended to find out whether Chinese EFL learners believe that they prefer RL and use more RL strategies than other memory strategies (MSs) in vocabulary learning. The results suggest positive responses and RL strategies as predominant agreement was found. The answer was overwhelmingly “Yes”.

The second research question was intended to find out whether RL strategies appear to work better or worse than other strategies in the context of Chinese EFL learning and related examinations. The answer was “Better”, as judged by the subjects’ stated beliefs and their test results. Significantly, however, the responses from teacher questionnaires suggest more “disagree” than “agree” (see 4.4). Other MSs were also identified as being useful and should not be neglected.

The third research question was intended to identify whether there is any association between respondents’ beliefs about RL and their results on the vocabulary test. The Chi-square test affirms the significance, demonstrating that the majority of the Full-RL-supporters did, in fact, gain high scores in the test; whereas the majority of the Partial RL-supporters get low scores.

The fourth research question was intended to investigate whether Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies are helpful at all stages of EFL vocabulary learning. The answer was mostly “Yes”, but there to be appeared some different beliefs in terms of *Partially Agree*.

The fifth research question was intended to investigate whether the Chinese learners believe that there is any relationship between RL and other MSs. The answer was “yes”, the RL strategies are important for establishing a basic knowledge in order to develop more knowledge using other MSs.

The sixth research question was especially designed to test whether Chinese EFL learners hold positive beliefs about Confucian heritage learning culture and values. The results indicate that traditional Chinese cultural values were both valued in themselves and identified as having a significant impact on subjects’ choice of MSs. The six factors identified as the result of factor analysis (see 4.1.5-2), reflected subjects’ traditional Chinese orientation to learning English vocabulary, indicating the influence of Confucian-heritage Culture on their choice of MSs. Furthermore, the analysis of responses to interviews (see 4.2.3-2) revealed a further 6 factors which demonstrated a link between Confucian heritage culture and subjects’ preferred MSs. Further, there appeared an implication that the main hypothesis was confirmed: Chinese EFL learners believe that rote learning strategies are preferable to other memory strategies for learning and memorising vocabulary. The characteristics of Chinese EFL learners in terms of the combination of memorisation and understanding indicated consistency with previous studies (Biggs 1996; Kennedy (2002), reflecting the deeper processes associated with RL in the context of traditional Chinese culture and values (see Chapters 5 & 6 for further discussion).

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings of this investigation in further detail and analyses the extent to which they support the research hypotheses. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the interpretations offered.

5.1 Hypothesis and results

As discussed in the previous chapters, this study focuses on Chinese EFL learners' culturally-influenced beliefs about their preference for RL strategies in their vocabulary learning. This research was designed to address six research questions (see Chapter 1, 1.3). To support the main hypothesis, six sub-hypotheses were formulated as possible responses to the six research questions (see Chapter 2, 2.4). For the convenience of presenting the discussion of the findings, the six research questions and the main hypothesis together with the six sub-hypotheses are listed in this chapter again.

Answers were sought to the following questions:

1. Do Chinese EFL learners prefer RL and believe that they use more RL strategies than other memory strategies?
2. Do Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies work better or worse than other strategies?
3. Is there any relationship between beliefs about RL and learners' achievement in the English vocabulary test?

4. Do Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies are helpful in all stages of EFL vocabulary learning?
5. What do Chinese EFL learners believe is the relationship between RL and other memory strategies?
6. Do Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies reflect traditional Chinese culture and values?

The main hypothesis is that Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies are preferable to other memory strategies for learning and memorising vocabulary. They hold positive beliefs about RL because they consider RL strategies to be consistent with traditional Chinese culture and values. This hypothesis is subdivided into six sections:

- 1). Chinese EFL learners state that they prefer RL strategies to other memory strategies and that they use more RL strategies than other memory strategies;
- 2). Chinese EFL learners believe that RL works better for memorising vocabulary than other strategies;
- 3). Those who believe in the effectiveness of RL perform better in vocabulary tests than those who do not.
- 4). Chinese EFL learners believe that RL is effective both in the initial stages and the higher stages of language learning;
- 5). Chinese EFL learners believe that RL conveys the basic knowledge to develop other memory strategies;
- 6). RL is believed to be of Confucian cultural value in China.

While a summary of results in relation to each research question was presented in Chapter 4—Statements of results (see 4.5), in this Chapter the findings will be discussed in further details.

The results of this study indicated that there is a degree of support for each of the sub-hypotheses, as demonstrated in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 Summary of the results of hypotheses

Hypotheses	Results
1 Chinese EFL learners state that they prefer RL strategies to other memory strategies and that they use more RL strategies than other memory strategies;	Supported
2 Chinese EFL learners believe that RL works better for memorising vocabulary than other strategies;	Mostly supported
3 Those who believe in the effectiveness of RL perform better in vocabulary tests than those who do not.	Supported
4 Chinese EFL learners believe that RL is effective both in the initial stages and the higher stages of language learning;	Mostly supported
5 Chinese EFL learners believe that RL conveys the basic knowledge to develop other memory strategies;	Supported
6 RL is believed to be of Confucian cultural value in China.	Mostly supported

The extent to which the findings of this study support each of these hypotheses will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

5.1.1 Hypothesis 1 (Chinese EFL learners state that they prefer RL strategies to other memory strategies and that they use more RL strategies than other memory strategies) and findings:

Hypothesis 1 is confirmed with an overwhelming majority of “Agree” demonstrated by the responses from the questionnaire and interview data. Chinese EFL teachers’

views on students' preferred MSs ascertained the generalisability of the findings (see 4.4, Table 4.14).

A descriptive analysis of the responses to the 12 statements as first part of questionnaire (see 4.1.1) to elicit the respondents' beliefs about MSs in EFL vocabulary learning suggests that Chinese EFL learners believe that of all the MSs for vocabulary learning, RL strategies were preferable. The mean of the RL strategy is the highest of the 4 MSs categories (M=4.07), followed by reviewing (M=3.94); creating mental linkages (M=3.73); and applying images and sounds (M=3.29). Responses to the 28 statements as second part of questionnaire (see 4.1.2) to elicit the respondents' beliefs about their preferred MSs they actually used in vocabulary learning also demonstrated that the mean of the rote learning strategy is the highest of the 4 MSs categories (M=4.07). This was followed by reviewing (M=3.49); creating mental linkages (M=3.10); and applying images and sounds (M=2.63). The pie-chart (see Chapter 4, Figure 4.3) was based on the responses to the first question in Part 2 of the interview (see 4.2.2) about the most frequently used MSs in China and which the participants believed to be most helpful in vocabulary learning. It was demonstrated that RL strategies were believed to be used overwhelmingly (89%) in preference to the other 3 MSs, with 6% of reviewing, 3% of creating mental linkages and 2% of applying images and sounds. The findings discussed above showed that of the 4 MSs, RL was placed as the highest with reviewing the second, creating mental linkages the third and applying images and sounds the last when Chinese EFL learners' learning vocabulary.

The responses to the rank-ordering of memory strategy preferences as Part 1 in the interview as a form of triangulation for the questionnaire data, by using Condorcet's Method for calculating a majority decision (see 4.2.1) did show the subjects' No. 1

preference for repetition as main feature of RL and No. 2 preference for Reviewing, each of which was identified as one part of RL with CHCs in this study. Of the 4 MSs, RL and Reviewing were ranked as the first two preferred strategies as indicated from questionnaire data analysis. However, it also indicated the subjects' more extended responses to their beliefs about the use of RL, for example, RL was not only placed No.1 preference but was also placed at the 5th, 7th and 9th position in the rank ordering. There might be some respondents who do not quite support RL as the most favorable MSs for some reason. Further findings arising from the content analysis will be discussed later in this chapter. Although there were some differences in ranking MSs in the interview data from the questionnaire data, the first position of RL in the ranking of MSs showed the importance of RL for the learners. It could be concluded that the responses to both closed questions in Part 1 and Part 2 of the questionnaire and closed questions in Part 1 of the interview indicated the respondents' preference for RL strategies as opposed to other MSs and believed that they made greater use of it than the other 3 categories of MSs in vocabulary learning.

5.1.2 Hypothesis 2 (Chinese EFL learners believe that RL works better for memorising vocabulary than other strategies) and findings:

Hypothesis 2 is mostly supported or partially supported because of some rejections from Chinese EFL teachers in triangulation.

The responses to the first open question in the student questionnaire focused on two strategies, RL and Reviewing with 100 % agreement (see 4.1.3). Repetition as a main feature of RL both in spoken and written form were highly believed to be the most effective strategies for learning and memorising vocabulary. However, the responses from the Chinese EFL teachers was different (see 4.4). From the data in Table 4.14,

Question 3, “Rote learning works better than other memory strategies in China. Do you agree?” received more negative than positive responses with 26% “Agree”, 50% “disagree” and 24% “Partially agree”. According to their explanations, RL still remained the most useful strategy at the beginning of learning, but they implied that other MSs should not be neglected and particularly that they have high expectation of using communicative strategies. Thus it indicated that the EFL teachers did not hold fully negative views about this belief. Furthermore, it implied that the Chinese EFL teachers took the narrow or passive concept of RL for this belief rather than active or broad concept RL with CHCs.

The responses to Open question 3 in Part 2 of the interview “Which kinds of strategies can help you personally become a better English learner?” were mostly “RL is better” (90%). 10% of the subjects agreed with the majority, but also revealed that “RL is helpful to get better scores than any other MSs.” “The words learnt through RL will be easily forgotten after exams unless it is reviewed very often” (see 4.2.2). Thus, the response to this hypothesis could be concluded as mostly supported or partially supported. It also indicated that passive RL strategies were required by the exam requirements in China which could be traced back to the Imperial Examination as reviewed in Chapter 2.

5.1.3 Hypothesis 3 (Those who believe in the effectiveness of RL perform better in vocabulary tests than those who do not) and findings:

Hypothesis 3 is supported with the results of the vocabulary test.

The Chi-square analysis was conducted (see 4.3.4) to determine whether there was any significant difference between the subjects who fully believed in using RL strategies and who partially believed in using RL vis-à-vis their test results. The

reason why the two groups were labelled as *full RL-supporters* and *partial RL-supporters* was already explained in 4.3.4. Table 4.13 presents an association between the Belief Group and Test Result variables: of the 56 subjects among 100 participants, 18 Full-RL-supporters got higher scores in the test in comparison with 16 who got lower scores; whereas the majority of the 19 Partial RL-supporters got lower scores in comparison with 3 who got higher scores. Chi-square analysis determined that the observed differences were significant ($p < .01$). However, a closer look at the 2x2 contingency table implied that the conclusion might not be very strong, for the gap between 18 high achievers and 16 low achievers in the group of *full RL-supporters* was only 2. It implied that those in the group of *full RL-supporters* may succeed or fail, even though in the group of *partial RL-supporters* much more students (19) get lower achievement while only 3 got higher achievement. Furthermore, the findings that there was no group for *Non-RL supporters* suggest that RL strategies were widely or popularly used among Chinese EFL learners. In this study, no responses were found to reject RL for EFL vocabulary learning.

5.1.4 Hypothesis 4 (Chinese EFL learners believe that RL is effective both in the initial stages and the higher stages of language learning) and findings:

Hypothesis 4 is mostly supported or partially supported with slightly different beliefs that RL is not very important for the learners at higher levels.

The responses to Open question 5 in Part 2 of the interview (see 4.2.2) “Which kinds of strategies do you think are all useful for learners at different levels of English?” demonstrated the agreement of RL with *fully agree* (89%) and *partially agree* (11%) among the 100 students respondents. The reason for the 11% of *partially agree* was that “RL is useful in all the stages of learning, but it seems more useful in the early

stage” as revealed by the respondents. This finding gained generalisability through the form of triangulation by EFL teachers’ views (see 4.4). The responses to Statement 4 in teachers’ questionnaire (“Rote learning is effective in vocabulary learning and it is helpful for all the learners at all stages---from beginners to the advanced learners. Please comment on it.”) showed the results of 40% *agree*, 5% *disagree* and 55% belonged to the group of *others/partially agree* (see Table 4.14). Their comments were consistent with the ones the student subjects made.

It indicates that RL is very useful for learners in initial stages. The result is also found to be consistent with previous researchers (e.g. Grains & Redman 1986). Although there were some differences in agreement about RL for beginning and higher level students, the subjects take RL as a helpfully used strategy in their EFL vocabulary learning.

5.1.5 Hypothesis 5 (Chinese EFL learners believe that RL conveys the basic knowledge to develop other memory strategies) and findings:

Hypothesis 5 is confirmed from the interview response that RL gives a basic knowledge to develop other MSs.

The overwhelming majority of the subjects (99%) responded “RL as an essential stage for basic knowledge to advanced stages” to Open question 4 in Part 2 of the interview “What do you think of the relationship between rote learning and the other three large categories of memory strategies as mentioned previously?” It indicated the important role of RL for gaining basic knowledge in their EFL vocabulary learning

5.1.6 Hypothesis 6 (RL is believed to be of Confucian cultural value in China) and findings:

Hypothesis 6 at first seems difficult to determine, but the final results support the suggestion that RL is believed to be of Confucian cultural value in China.

The responses to Open question 2 in Part 2 of the interview (see 4.2.2) “What do you think of rote learning for Chinese learners in vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs)?” and Statement 2 “Rote learning suits Chinese learners best to memorise vocabulary” in EFL teacher questionnaire (see 4.4) all showed positive beliefs about RL strategies. The predominant response was that RL “Suits Chinese EFL learners” which revealed Chinese EFL learners’ use of RL involves far more complex processes than have been supposed to be (see 4.1.5-2 for the 6 factors from a factor analysis of the 28 items on the beliefs about Chinese EFL learners’ use of MSs: Active CHC-based MSs; Repetition with perseverance strategies; Repetition with association strategies; Memorisation through practice strategies; Exam-oriented MSs and Repetition to enhance better use of words strategies). The details of which will be discussed later in this chapter. However, the content analysis in Table 4.8 reveals that 71% of the subjects believed RL as cultural values, whereas 29% of them thought “too traditional” with an indication of getting rid of it, even though they agreed with the values of traditional Chinese culture. The responses to Open question 2 in the interview “Have you ever thought about getting rid of rote learning if it is traditional? Why?” brought more “Yes” (55%) than “No” (45%) responses. Interestingly, the “negative” responses came to support the use of RL in China for the benefits of RL strategies with Confucian cultural influence. Hypothesis 6 also indicated some reason why RL is used and will continue to be used by Chinese EFL learners. RL influenced by the traditional Chinese culture, national situation and the

Chinese linguistic background is so deep-rooted and far-reaching that is difficult to remove (see the 6 factors in 4.2.3).

5.1.7 The main hypothesis and findings

The main hypothesis (Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies are preferable to other memory strategies for learning and memorising vocabulary. They hold positive beliefs about RL, because they consider RL strategies to be consistent with traditional Chinese culture and values.) is supported by both quantitative and qualitative results. The findings particularly emerged from the content analysis of the data suggest a reflection of the traditional values in Chinese EFL learners in vocabulary learning. One of the most important findings arise from this research is the strengthening of existing evidence that RL as conceived by some Confucian Heritage learners is different from the sort of surface-level learning which its critics- both within China and outside China- assume it to be. In this study, the subjects' beliefs about RL with CHCs demonstrated two types of RL: Passive RL which refers to a mere reliance on repetition or memorisation without proper understanding and Active Confucian-based MSs which refer to a combination of repetition, memorisation, practice, understanding and reviewing. The findings of Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about RL emerge from this study are consistent with active Confucian-based MSs (e.g. see the results of a factor analysis, 4.1.5-2).

Thus, *active Confucian-based MSs* as a new term should be devised to describe the combination of Confucian-based learning strategies which have been narrowly described as passive RL.

5.2 Summary of the findings

On the basis of the findings of this study, it is possible to make the following statements about Chinese EFL learners:

1) Chinese learners of English generally hold highly positive beliefs about RL in EFL vocabulary learning, as shown in Chapter 4 (e.g. see 4.1.1; 4.1.2; 4.2.2) by the responses to the research questions. The results are consistent with the widely-held beliefs that Chinese EFL learners use more RL than Western learners as described in the Literature Review.

2) A factor analysis of the 28 items on Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the use of MSs identified six factors (see 4.1.5-2) which indicated the learners' beliefs reflecting the influence of Chinese traditional oriented culture on their learning strategies.

3) For Chinese EFL learners, RL does not mean passive learning, but a combination of memorisation and understanding, which is consistent with previous studies (e.g. Biggs 1996, 1999). This study also suggests that Chinese EFL learners believe that RL is an integration of repetition, memorisation and practice rather than mere repetition, and that RL strategies also involve reviewing, which plays an important part in their approach to learning. Reviewing is taken as an activity that is used to encourage individuals to reflect, describe, analyse and communicate what they have recently experienced, and strengthen memory. As Greenaway puts it (2002:1): "Reviewing processes can include: reflecting on experience; analysing experience; making sense of experience; communicating experience, reframing experience and

learning from experience”. These are consistent with part of active Confucian-based MSs.

4) Chinese learners seem to rely on examination-oriented memory strategies, and especially RL, which will help them succeed in the examination-driven educational system. They also see RL as a way of establishing a solid foundation of accurate knowledge on which the development of other learning is based.

5) Chinese learners prefer accuracy to fluency. They believe that it is essential to gain a solid foundation in English vocabulary, which is primarily, though not solely, built on accuracy. This view is based on the belief that once bad language habits are formed, they are difficult to break.

6) Chinese EFL learners believe that RL is an effective way to learn vocabulary but may not be the best way. They believe that there is no single “best” strategy for them to learn EFL vocabulary, and that a particular memory strategy may not suit the needs of all learners. However, although they would like to use all means available to them as they work to learn EFL vocabulary, they feel constrained by the limits of time and the demands of the exam-oriented Chinese educational system, which rewards accurate memorisation above other aspects of EFL use.

7) Chinese EFL learners continue to use RL in preference to other strategies. This continued preference for RL can be attributed to six factors, identified from the content analysis (adapted from Wenden 1987) of interview and questionnaire responses in this study. The six factors identified from the content analysis were:

- 1) Chinese educational/cultural background;
- 2) EFL environment;
- 3) traditional habit;

- 4) national situation/examination demand;
- 5) Chinese linguistic background/the way of learning mother tongue and
- 6) Failure to try out “best” strategies.

The findings of this study suggest that, taken together, these factors may account for the prevalence of RL as a preferred vocabulary learning strategy among mainland Chinese EFL learners, and for its continuing popularity and success.

Each of these factors will be examined in detail below and related to the hypotheses for this study.

5.3 Discussion of the six factors arising from content analysis

Factor 1: Chinese educational and cultural background: Confucian heritage culture and the use of RL

While it is clear from the literature review that the roots of RL in Chinese culture are complex (see 2.3.3-4), it was noticeable that the results obtained regarding the respondents’ understanding of Chinese traditional culture in the present study suggested a view of RL which is consistent with Confucius’ teaching principles. On the basis of these responses, the nature of RL in China should not be taken as passive but as active, reflecting traditional Chinese cultural values. The subjects’ responses to the questionnaire item, “What do you think of RL for Chinese EFL learners in vocabulary learning strategies?” suggest that the heritage of Confucian culture aims to cultivate learners as polite, intelligent, creative, independent and practical beings, rather than passive knowledge receivers, and that they see traditional learning strategies as contributing to this aim. This is also supported by the subjects’

justification of their beliefs in the interviews. The following excerpts (translated from Chinese) from the interviews reveal participants' strong beliefs about the relationship between Confucian cultural influence and the use of RL in mainland China.

In answering questions 1 and 2 in the interviews (see 4.2.2), they explained why they use most of RL strategies and reject getting rid of them:

- “I think there must be a misunderstanding about RL as a memory strategy. It is not mere memorisation without understanding.”
- “RL may be caused by the *keju* (imperial examination system) examination in ancient China. The examination papers were set to test primarily the abilities of the candidates' memories in reciting classical works based on the Confucian classics. In other words, creative thinking, concept formation, information processing, and decision-making abilities were not given prominent attention. That time has gone and things are different in our time. I learn knowledge, I understand, I memorise and I do exercises to strengthen my memory.”
- “RL may be partly caused by Confucian unequal interpersonal relationships with its emphasis on social norms and ideal types of behaviour. I do take what teachers say very seriously and learn something important by heart because I know they give me academic knowledge. The teachers make us work very hard and I would like to cooperate. It is good for my parents' wish and my own future career.”
- “I am proud of Confucian culture and I have memorised many Confucian sayings and maxims from which I have benefited a lot to guide my way of learning, that is generally, studying, reviewing, practising leading to solving exercise problems.”
- “Confucian educational principles involve repetition or recitation. I think I really need repetitions when I learn English words, particularly fixed expressions with fixed meaning. I keep in my mind forever if they are correct.”

- “Confucian educational principles involve practice. I work very hard to memorise what I have learnt and practise many, many times by doing a lot of exercises or talking with my classmates, in the hope of getting a better understanding and higher marks in the class test or big examinations.”
- “Confucian culture advocates a way of learning through thinking. I am thinking while I am memorising. I found that each time with the method of thinking and asking myself questions while learning, new understanding will appear.”
- “Confucian culture encourages diligence and hard work in learning. I found that the more I read, the more I know and the more time I spend on my course, the deeper understanding I get. Of course, the better scores I get!”

The responses from this study suggest a firm belief that for Chinese EFL learners, RL does not mean passive rote memorisation or mere repetition without understanding, but deeper memorisation and deeper understanding. The statements made by the respondents also reflect traditional Chinese cultural values such as respecting teachers, working hard, memorising with understanding, and practicing frequently. The influence of China’s ancient examination system on the use of RL is also indicated, but it does not seem fair to attribute passive RL use to Confucius’ educational principles. It is a complex issue as suggested in the literature review (see Chapter 2). Even where respondents did not hold a wholly positive view of RL, its effects were not actually seen as negative (see Chapter 4, Table 4.8).

Factor 2: EFL environment: Formal classroom setting & the use of RL

The results from this study suggest that China’s EFL environment is another factor contributing to the use of RL, and respondents’ beliefs about the advantages and disadvantages of the EFL environment and the use of RL have also been indicated.

As discussed in Chapter 2, English as a world language is a total foreign language in China. That is, it is taught in schools, often widely, but it does not play an essential role in national or social life. This means that very few people actually use English in day-to-day interaction. English is largely confined to international trade, some aspects of education and the media. The effects of this on Chinese EFL students' experience of learning English can be seen from the following extracts from the interview data (see Chapter 4, Table 4.8):

- “I have few chances to contact foreigners to practise my English, I have to learn by heart.”
- “The practice of memorising what I have learnt is the only way to gain knowledge for the exams.”
- “The EFL learning is often highly structured or organised and the classroom is the main source of learning English knowledge.”
- “Only by acquiring a strong foundation of knowledge through more overall control can one's English be quickly developed as needed when he/she becomes exposed to an English environment.”
- “I am in constant anxiety over the prospect of being a student some day in an English-speaking country. It will take some time for me to be able to speak English in an English-speaking environment. But I have the self-confidence to be a very good student with a good language knowledge learnt in China through RL.”
- “I am ready to go abroad to see if I can change the way of learning English.”
- “Actually, the department encourages communication and interaction in class, particularly after class. I do have some practice through pair, group work and role-plays, etc. when I have spare time.”

The lack of a communicative and social environment for learning English in China was identified by several respondents during the interviews. This seems to lead to a greater use of RL inside China, based on a belief in the value of RL strategies in

providing a solid foundation of knowledge in preparation for going into an English-speaking environment in the future. In this context, the use of RL is seen to be an advantage. Furthermore, the students' responses do reveal the case of carrying out communication and interaction activities in the Chinese settings. It would be interesting to follow a number of Chinese EFL learners to English-speaking countries for the purpose of investigating their English vocabulary learning strategies within an English-speaking context, and this would be a fruitful area for future research.

Factor 3: Traditional habits: Deep roots & practical perspective

The findings from this study confirm that RL involving repetition and reviewing are the main features of Chinese people's learning styles. When asked the reason why, in the interviews, respondents frequently stated that it is "a Chinese traditional habit".

RL or memorisation/recitation have deep roots in traditional Chinese ideas about education as discussed by many researchers (e.g. Huang & Naerssen 1987:294; Rao 1996:463 and others). The findings in this study suggest consistency with this view.

The following excerpts are typical of responses to this view:

- "I know, in the early years of learning, my great granddad, my granddad, my father all use the methods of repetition and memorisation, and I do the same. Thus, RL strategies as Chinese traditional learning habits are handed down from generation to generation and there seems no end to it."
- "I began to recite or memorise numbers (from 1 to 100), rhymes, poems, riddles, proverbs etc. from family, nursery, kindergarten, even to school days."
- "Parents' perception of the value of children hinges on how many famous poems or how many historic events they can learn by heart."

- “When I went to school, teachers were interested to know how many Chinese characters I could memorise and very happy to see me writing them out.”
- “I have to recite and review what teacher has taught us in class many times until I can commit it to memory, because in next class the teachers would ask us to recall the material exactly as it was presented.
- “We learn everything by heart since childhood or we just follow the teachers no matter whether it is a grammar-translation method or a communicative method. It must be a good method if it is beneficial for knowledge acquisition.”
- “I feel that what was learnt can be easily forgotten, if not reviewed from time to time.”

Data obtained from the questionnaires show that the subjects rated RL and reviewing as their first and second preferences in a rank ordering of learning strategies (see Chapter 4, 4.4.1 and 4.1.2). When asked to explain those preferences, respondents stated:

- “The traditional ways of using repetition and reviewing in teaching and learning still have a prevailing influence on primary, secondary and even college, and university education in China. I feel that it is not only because of their deep roots, but also because of their benefits.”
- “RL involves broader aspects of MSs than it seems to be. RL involving repetition, memorisation, reviewing, etc. does not only help us with a consolidation of old knowledge, but also can help in linking old knowledge with new knowledge and a new understanding will appear. Thus, we have the self-confidence when answering questions proposed by teachers.”

The respondents’ statements listed above suggest that RL as a traditional habit is deeply ingrained in the mind of Chinese people. This kind of learning strategy has been carried out from generation to generation and is exceptionally resistant to change. Although some responses (see Chapter 4, Table 4.8) demonstrated the idea

“too traditional” to RL and intended to “get rid of it”, RL strategies as a value of traditional Chinese cultures are identified and supported by Chinese EFL learners. As Zhu (1998:11) states: “If our traditions and culture are considered as expressing a unique Eastern aesthetic, how can we reject or abandon the treasures left to us by our ancestors?”

The subjects in this study believe that knowledge is consolidated by repeated encounters. The idea is that the more times we are exposed to material, the deeper it will sink in. As one respondent stated: “The lists of essential information gained through RL will save time in the end and we can refresh our memory before exams”.

The findings of this study indicate that there was a difference of opinion among the respondents to whether RL only serves short-term memorisation. As discussed in Chapter 4, in response to the interview question of whether the learners would like to get rid of RL, it was found that 55% said “yes” and 45% said “no”, in spite of the majority view in favor of RL in response to other questions. The content analysis indicates that the respondents had contradictory feelings about this question, particularly regarding the benefits of RL in memorising vocabulary. One of the specific explanations for answering “yes” was the complaint that RL only benefits short-term memory which was shared by 11% of respondents (see Chapter 4, Table 4.8). All the subjects believe that in language learning, it is vocabulary which makes most demands on memory. RL was believed by 11% of the subjects to be effective for short-term memory needs but these respondents believed that retention rapidly falls as the statement in the interview demonstrated: “After half a year, or an even shorter time, most rote-learned information is beyond recall.”

However, those 45% who hold firm beliefs about using RL argued that long-term memory requires understanding, frequent revision, personal involvement and varied

opportunities for use and application and that their understanding and use of RL combines these factors. “Memory achieved through RL can be transferable to other contexts so that the limited value of RL can be changed into limitless value”. Therefore, in the view of these respondents, RL can be understood as short-term, but not short-lived. As Liu (2001) points out, according to Hebb’s (1949) Consolidation Theory, short-term memory can be transferred to long-term memory, and cause solid structural changes in the brain if the material is rehearsed long enough. This is consistent with the belief of some of the subjects in this study that the transfer of information from short-term memory to long-term memory is simply a matter of time and rehearsal.

Factor 4: National situation/examination demand: Scores & ability

The findings of this study suggest that the exam-driven Chinese educational system seems to be another factor leading to the prevalence of RL. The results of the data analysis suggest that Chinese EFL learners favour “advanced learning strategies” such as communicative strategies which would help them follow the world-wide fashion (see 4.4, results of teacher questionnaire), but mainly rely on examination-oriented memory strategies, believing that RL would help them succeed in the examination-driven educational system. For example, 90% of the respondents agreed that RL was the only way for accuracy of knowledge, 10% of the respondents agreed with them, but also thought that RL was no use after exams (see Chapter 4, Table 4.8). While there is some debate in the research literature as to whether the Chinese examination system tests knowledge or ability (see, for example, Su, 1998:39), the demand for accuracy in the exams appears to have contributed to the retention of RL.

Respondents in the interviews are also afraid that a bad habit can become second nature if the mistake is not corrected at once. During the interviews, the subjects revealed that, in order to do well in the university-conducted examinations, they prepared themselves through careful and close reading of text books and/or reference books with a lot of exercises, and memorised keys to some fixed collocations. In other words, they used RL strategies that ensured their getting high scores in the examinations, although they could not tell whether or not this would improve their mastery of English outside the examination context.

The respondents felt that the knowledge gained through RL could accelerate the speed of answering the questions and help build up confidence. However, they also stated that the best learning method is an unattainable ideal, for what works well at one moment may be a failure at another. They felt that the strength of RL must always be acknowledged, and so must the fact that RL has its weaknesses. For example, responses included the following statements:

- “I mostly use RL strategies in EFL learning, because the exam papers seem to be designed to test fixed, accurate knowledge as presented by the teachers, which require a lot of repetition and memorisation. Thus, I do not feel *safe enough* if I do not keep what I have learnt in class deep in my mind before any tests.”
- “I repeat, I memorise the vocabulary, particularly phrases or collocations on the premise of understanding not only for guaranteed higher scores, but also for my deep improving of knowledge.”
- “I think I have benefited a lot from using RL strategies in EFL vocabulary learning. Accuracy of knowledge learnt by rote enables me to be more confident in any study situation, and I feel proud of the correct knowledge, and I do not panic.”

- “I agree with many other classmates that RL is the most effective way for accuracy of knowledge leading to high scores in exams, however, I also feel worried that much of our time spent on memorising accurate answers through RL just for examination high scores may limit our time to do more creative tasks.”
- “I am sure that we may change our present learning methods if course requirements or exam requirements can be changed towards more creative emphasis.”

Factor 5: Chinese linguistic background: The way of learning mother tongue & the use of RL

The influence of the mother tongue on second language or foreign language vocabulary acquisition and use has been identified and studied by many researchers (for example, Swan 1997). Some research has identified pedagogically sound reasons for using mother tongue including translation techniques, to aid EFL teaching and learning in class, demonstrating, for example, that it saves time and ensures students' understanding (e.g. Atkinson 1993; Chambers 1992). Swan takes into account the ways in which the mother tongue can support, fail to support or actively hinder someone who is learning or using the vocabulary of a second language. Within the broader context of this study, the researcher's concern is to identify whether the use of RL in EFL is influenced by Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the way in which the Chinese language is learnt, rather than to analyse the use of mother tongue in the Chinese EFL classroom. Secondly, if the respondents expressed the view that their approach to EFL learning echoed their approach to learning with Chinese, the researcher was concerned to establish whether this helped EFL vocabulary learning or hindered it.

The findings from this study reveal that respondents adopted a number of strategies from their learning of written Chinese to the learning of English vocabulary. 61% of the respondents strongly agreed that they benefited a lot from the previous experienced ways of learning the Chinese language when learning EFL (see Chapter 4, Table 4.8). Some specific examples of strategies demonstrated by the content analysis of the respondents' statements will be presented below:

The application of learning strategies from Chinese to English

Strokes of Chinese characters and spelling of English words

- “I learn English words just by the exact way as I use to learn Chinese characters. I have to memorise the order of each stroke in a character, and I repeat the spelling of each word both orally and in a written form.”
- “I memorise each letter in each word as I do with each stroke in each Chinese character, or else an error will cause wrong words.”
- “I am very happy that I seldom or never make English spelling mistakes in any types of tests, because I have benefited a lot from the strict ways of learning Chinese characters through RL.”

Chinese compounds and English combined words

- “When we learn Chinese written language, we often combine different characters to create a new meaning on the premise of memorising the meaning of each character. I find it is very easy for me to remember English compound words, because it is very similar as I do with Chinese combined characters for a new meaning.”

- “I think I use RL to remember English combined words although sometimes I can guess the meanings, because using RL is my habitual way of learning Chinese compounds.”

Chinese proverbs and English proverbs and collocations

- “Each character in Chinese proverbs are strictly placed, and the order of a single character can not be changed nor is each character allowed to be replaced by any other synonyms. I have to learn them by heart, and deal with English collocations and proverbs in the same way for fear of making mistakes in exams.”
- “I recite English proverbs and repeatedly do collocation exercises either by myself or with my classmates in the same way as I learn Chinese proverbs or maxims.”
- “I have many equivalents of Chinese-English proverbs or sayings in my mind. They are very helpful in my understanding the different cultures and essay writings.”
- “The method of RL used to learn Chinese proverbs and applied to learn English collocations or any phrases with fixed meanings can increase confidence and efficiency in exams.”

The responses from the interviews indicate that the subjects felt they needed to use RL for learning and memorising both Chinese and English, and particularly for learning “fixed forms”. The results of the test show considerable individual ability in efficiency and accuracy, suggesting that the subjects’ EFL learning in the areas tested has benefited from their approach to memorising Chinese characters, collocations and proverbs. The results of Part 2 in the vocabulary test, completing the proverbs, indicate the highest scores with a full mark of 10% (M=8.28) in the whole test paper.

That arises from the subjects' belief that language has "fixed" forms and meanings which can not be changed and which can therefore be learnt by RL.

Factor 6: Failure to try out new strategies: Cultural value and continued reliance on RL

Responses to the questions in the interview "Have you ever thought about getting rid of rote learning if it is traditional? Why?" represent a complex reaction of 45% "No" and 55% "Yes". Those 45% subjects who fully supported the employment of RL in China, responded very positively, with statements such as, "We never think of dispensing with RL in our EFL vocabulary learning". However, 55% of the subjects gave a dual reply: "Yes, but finally gave up the idea of getting rid of RL." It should be noted here that their detailed explanations indicate that they were actually reluctant to give up RL. The response does indeed suggest that they see RL as quite significant in their learning. They feel they can not dispense with RL when their test scores were running down due to totally stopping using repetitions.

The 55% subjects who considered getting rid of RL, but later gave up the idea, offered at least three possible explanations for the failure of Chinese EFL learners to try out new strategies. The first concerns the persistence of familiar strategies; the second is the limited time available to try new strategies and the third is the pressure of exams, which require accuracy for higher scores. This suggests that China's unique culture and educational system make it difficult for learners to get rid of RL, and favor a continued reliance on it. Furthermore, the respondents see RL as bringing actual benefits to their learning, even when they have considered dispensing with it. Examples of the statements made by the respondents are organised and given below:

- “I know that RL is good for us, but I often wonder if there are other memory strategies that may be even better.”
- “I tried new strategies such as using images in terms of key word. I find that the new ways are very time-consuming and affect my test scores, because I need to make sure of the exact answers through many repetitions.”
- “My interests straddle traditional Chinese RL method and Western communicative strategies. Unfortunately I can not find enough time to try both because of so many books to read.”
- “The comparatively lower scores made me believe that the knowledge I get through RL helps me ease tension and build my confidence while I was answering questions on any occasion.”
- “I found that my habitual style of learning is so rooted. It is very hard to completely forget it and use new ways.”
- “I feel double pressures: on the one hand I want to follow the fashion of new methods and throw away the old-fashioned methods since RL has existed for more than 2000 years, on the other hand I want to retain traditional Chinese culture because there are a lot of values.”
- “I don’t think teachers care about the ways how we are learning, but pay great attention to our learning results in terms of scores.”

These findings support the view that beliefs tend to be culturally bound, to be formed early in life and to be resistant to change (e.g Williams & Burden 1997:56).

The findings also indicate the difficulties of pedagogic reform in China. Where EFL learners have tried to adopt new strategies, they have been unsuccessful because of the pressure of habitual ways of learning and the particular demands of the educational system. There is a lot of homework, and many other tasks to handle and EFL learners do not seem to have enough time to try new strategies. The requirement of accuracy in the exams lends itself to the use of RL rather than less familiar strategies.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has provided the data analysis and discussion. While the results of the present study demonstrate partial support for three of the hypotheses and full support for the other three, and while the data appears to support the main hypothesis, the most important findings to emerge from the study is that RL, as understood by many CHC learners, involves a much deeper process than is supposed by its critics both within and beyond China. Therefore, the researcher wishes to suggest a new term “Active Confucian-based MSs” to distinguish these strategies from merely passive RL.

5.5 Limitations of the study

This section will explore the limitations of the present study, implications for future research and some questions which remain unanswered. Three key areas will be explored with respect to the limitations of the study: limitations in data collection, limitations in data analysis and limitations in the hypotheses.

5.5.1-1 Limitations in data collection

Distance and time

Firstly, while the subjects in this study were Chinese EFL university students in China, the researcher was based in the UK. As it was not possible to make an extended visit to China to carry out observations, the researcher was unable to

investigate learners' actual use of RL, either within china or beyond the classroom, and could only therefore focus on learners' beliefs about RL use. A careful examination of these strategies in use would have enhanced this study, and would make a valuable focus for further research.

Subjects

Secondly, beliefs and views from the 100 subjects' teachers might have been included in this study, but due to the teachers' busy workload at the collaborating university and the researcher's awareness of similar results as stated in Section 3.4.2, interviews were only conducted with the students. Furthermore, the researcher focused on 100 students within a single university, rather than sampling across a range of institutions.

These limitations were reduced to some extent by including a questionnaire to Chinese EFL university teachers in other cities in China, enabling the researcher to make some generalisations from the data as discussed in Chapter 4.

Misunderstanding of research questions

Thirdly, all research techniques suffer from certain limitations (Bryman 2001). In this study, there was some confusion over some academic terms in the questionnaire schedule. For instance, in both the questionnaire and the interview, some subjects misunderstood the term "key word" which was included in the category of memory strategies under the heading of "applying images and sounds", following Oxford

(1990: 41-42). In this context, “key word” use means remembering a new word by using auditory and visual links. The first step is to identify a familiar word in one's own language that sounds like the new word---this is the “auditory link.” The second step is to generate an image of some relationship between the new word and a familiar one--this is the “visual link”. Unfortunately, some subjects misunderstood the term as “main words or important words in the text”, which is a widely-recognised meaning for this phrase.

At the moment when misunderstanding appeared, the teacher who was helping with the organisation immediately offered an explanation and the participants were reminded of the glossary prepared by the researcher. Finally they understood the meaning of “key word” in this context and the different understanding did not have a major impact on the results of the study.

A language barrier could be considered to be unavoidable during the data collection. As EFL major learners, the subjects’ knowledge of English was sufficient to enable them to understand the questions and express themselves in writing, but their spoken English was still limited. To prevent the risk of losing information, the teachers in the classroom, during the questionnaire data collection, were ready to help in both Chinese and English. The interviews were conducted in a combination of English and Chinese, according to the subjects’ preference. The participants were mostly willing to speak English with the interviewer, not only to practise, but also to show their English in a good light.

Prestige bias

Every attempt was made during data collection to avoid prestige bias arising from respondents' feelings toward the researcher or toward other EFL learners.

For example, the researcher did not use any leading questions such as "RL is believed to be very helpful by many Chinese learners in the UK. What is your opinion on this issue?" This way of giving a statement might easily sway people who might want to align with learners in the UK or with the researcher, as both would be viewed with respect by learners inside China.

Good personal contacts were helpful but there were also some barriers which caused ambiguity during the interviews. There was a danger that the interviewees tried to please the interviewer by giving the expected reply because of the high respect given to the researcher's PhD degree work. In the light of this respect, it was particularly important for the researcher to hide her own views in order to elicit overall beliefs and views from the interviewees.

In order to reduce the likelihood of prestige bias, it was made clear throughout each interview that there were no correct or incorrect answers. The researcher tried to make the respondents feel at ease, and convince them that their individual contributions were considered to be relevant and important.

Lack of funding

Because this research was not funded, it depended heavily on the assistance and predisposition of the project participants. Without any financial incentives, the

researcher had to rely on good personal contacts and the good will of the collaborating university to understand the importance and value of this study. It was to the researcher's advantage that this study was conducted in the context of China's ongoing "open door" policy.

The participants were all born just in or after 1978, when China's "open door policy" toward the West began. They were more open-minded and showed fewer inhibitions in talking about their views than older people might have been, it was therefore easy to encourage them to speak their mind, and they were all very willing to participate in the study.

5.5.1-2 Limitations in data analysis

Categorisation of subjects

The researcher set out to categorise the subjects according to whether they held positive or negative beliefs about RL. However, even those who held some negative beliefs about RL also made use of RL, so it was not possible to identify a group of subjects who did not use RL at all. Evidence from the teacher questionnaires and from previous studies (e.g. Martinsons and Martinsons, 1996; Parry & Su, 1998) suggests that RL is used universally for EFL within China, so it is unlikely that the researcher would have been able to study a group of non-RL users anywhere in China. For this reason, an experimental study comparing RL users with non-RL users would not have been possible.

Differences between culture-specific and more universal learning dispositions towards RL

As mentioned in Chapter 1 (see 1.2), the findings of this study relate purely to the use of RL by Confucian heritage EFL learners within main land China. The findings suggest that the RL strategies used by this cultural group for EFL vocabulary learning involve repetition, memorisation, practice, understanding and reviewing lexical items. However, no attempt has been made here at a comparison with the RL strategies widely used by learners in other parts of the world. As Liu (2002) states, repetition strategies have been found to be generally employed by students in a range of other language contexts (e.g. Chamot 1987:80; Grenfell 1995:145; Lawson & Hogben 1996:120). A comparison between these strategies and those used by Confucian heritage learners would be a fruitful area for further study. This would also allow for an investigation into whether the strategies which the findings of this study suggest are culture-specific might actually be more universal.

5.5.1-3 Limitations in the hypothesis

While in this study the main hypothesis (Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies are preferable to other memory strategies for learning and memorising vocabulary. They hold positive beliefs about RL because they consider RL strategies to be consistent with traditional Chinese culture and values) is confirmed as discussed above, the researcher was aware that there were limitations in the hypothesis which might in turn have limited the research. A focus on the deeper uses

of RL for this study would enable the researcher to explore this aspect in more depth, and to make more of this aspect of the findings. Thus, a hypothesis proposing that Confucian heritage learners' use of "RL" actually involves far more complex processes than have been supposed to be might have enabled the researcher to focus the study more clearly on this issue, which would have become a key aspect of the findings.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter provides the summary and conclusions of the study and the implications of the present study for future research.

6.1 Summary and key findings

This study aims to fill a gap in the existing research literature about the relationship between Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about Chinese cultural values and their choice of RL as a preferred learning strategy. The study reviews significant aspects of Chinese cultural heritage and identifies these characteristics of Chinese cultural values which might have a significant impact on Chinese learners' choice of EFL vocabulary learning strategies. The study was conducted with the following aims in mind:

- (1) to promote a concrete understanding of the concept of RL in the literature;
- (2) to explore Chinese EFL learners' culturally-based beliefs about their preference for RL strategies;
- (3) to offer a challenge to widely-held beliefs that Confucian culture is a negative influence on RL;
- (4) to offer guidance to EFL teachers/researchers who are interested in Chinese EFL learners' memory strategy choice and use.

This research has answered the following questions:

- (1). Do Chinese EFL learners believe that they prefer RL and use more RL strategies than other memory strategies?
- (2). Do Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies work better or worse than other strategies?
- (3). Is there any relationship between beliefs about RL and the result of the vocabulary test?
- (4). Do Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies are helpful in all the stages of EFL vocabulary learning?
- (5). What do Chinese EFL learners believe is the relationship between RL and other memory strategies?
- (6). Do Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies reflect traditional Chinese culture and values?

(see Chapter 1, Section 1.3)

The hypothesis was formulated as a possible response to the research questions:

The main hypothesis is that Chinese EFL learners believe that RL strategies are preferable to other memory strategies for learning and memorising vocabulary. They hold positive beliefs about RL, because they consider RL strategies to be consistent with traditional Chinese culture and values. This hypothesis is subdivided into six sections:

- (1). Chinese EFL learners state that they prefer RL strategies to other memory strategies and use more RL strategies than other memory strategies;
- (2). Chinese EFL learners believe that RL works better for memorising vocabulary than other strategies;
- (3). Those who believe in the effectiveness of RL perform better in vocabulary test than those who do not believe.
- (4). Chinese EFL learners believe that RL is effective both in the initial stages and the higher stages of language learning;

- (5). Chinese EFL learners believe that RL gives the basic knowledge to develop other memory strategies;
- (6). RL is believed to be of Confucian cultural value in China.

The subjects were 100 students from the English department at a large University in the Northeast area of China, and data was collected using questionnaires, interviews and vocabulary tests. The analysis of the data addresses all the research questions and indicates that the hypotheses were generally confirmed. This study has provided a better understanding of Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the role of RL in vocabulary learning in mainland China as well as the association between learners' beliefs and their memory strategy use. Learners' beliefs about RL were found to be generally positive and strongly related to the influence of traditional Chinese culture and China's specific national situation.

A working definition of RL was established at the outset of the study:

RL is a learning strategy which involves repetition, memorisation, understanding, practice and reviewing lexical items.

(see Chapter1, p.14)

However, it became apparent during the course of the study that RL tends to be narrowly conceived in terms of its visible surface features (repetition, memorisation) without due consideration of its impact on deeper learning processes. This study supports the argument that Chinese learners are not passive learners, and that RL for Confucian heritage learners is a complex and active process. It suggests that Chinese culture should be highly valued in EFL vocabulary learning and that RL can be beneficial for CHC (Confucian Heritage Culture) learners.

For example, the findings of the study demonstrate a significant association between Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the values of RL and their vocabulary test results as indicated by the Chi-square analysis.

The results of the factor analysis of the 28 items in the questionnaire identified six factors which underlie the strategies preferred by Chinese learners, which indicated the learners' beliefs, reflecting the influence of Chinese traditional culture. The six factors are:

- (1). Active CHC-based MSs;
- (2). Repetition with perseverance strategies;
- (3). Repetition with association strategies;
- (4). Memorisation through practice strategies;
- (5). Exam-oriented MSs;
- (6). Repetition to enhance better use of words strategies.

The six factors not only indicate Chinese learners' beliefs about MSs usage, but also the main features of Chinese EFL learners with a background of Confucian heritage culture. For them, RL does not mean passive learning, but a combination of memorisation and understanding, which is consistent with previous studies on Asian learners (e.g. Biggs 1996, 1999, Kember 1998). Exam-oriented approaches to learning, as Sheorey (1999) argued, are also found to be one of the main reasons for using RL in China.

Six further factors were identified through the content analysis based on interview data to explain the reason why Chinese EFL learners hold positive beliefs about the role of RL in vocabulary learning.

These are:

- (1). Chinese cultural background;
- (2). EFL environment;
- (3). Traditional habit;
- (4). Examination demand;
- (5). Chinese linguistic background/the way of learning the mother tongue;
- (6). Failure to try out new strategies.

6.2 Conclusion

Overall, the major findings suggest that Chinese EFL learners prefer RL strategies to other MSs and believe that they use more RL strategies than other MSs. The findings also suggest that these learners' choice of MSs is guided by their beliefs, which in turn are shaped by their traditional culture. In short, what this study has perhaps shown most clearly, is that Chinese EFL learners with Confucian heritage cultures are not mere sponges, to use Chamot's term (1987:82), acquiring EFL vocabulary by osmosis. They are thinking, reflective beings who consciously apply RL strategies to learning EFL vocabulary. Several brief conclusions can be drawn:

Firstly, a new term need to be devised to describe RL with CHCs.

This study confirms the evidence from the literature review that, for CHC learners, RL is believed to be a complex process, involving repetition, memorisation, understanding, practice and reviewing. This research has demonstrated the features of a certain sort of RL characterised by Chinese EFL learners with CHCs. Therefore, the researcher suggests that a new term should be devised to describe the combination of Confucian-based MSs which have been narrowly described as RL referring to a mere memorisation without proper understanding. That is "Active

Confucian-based MSs” to distinguish these strategies from passive RL strategies. Furthermore, this study confirms that this combination of strategies is used by CHC learners in conjunction with other MSs for vocabulary learning.

Secondly, the use of passive RL by some CHC learners has more to do with the Imperial Examination System than with Confucian beliefs.

A general belief about Chinese, or even Asian learners is that these learners use more RL or memorisation strategies than learners from other cultures. This concept has become a mini caricature of Asian students (Oxford and Scarcella 1994:237, Oxford 1989:242), along with the belief that Chinese learners prefer passive rote learning strategies, leading to learning at a superficial level. The reason put forward to explain this in the research literature is the influence of deep-rooted Confucian principles of social norms or modest behaviour.

However, a careful scrutiny of Confucius’ learning principles suggests that previous beliefs about the features of Chinese EFL learners are not well founded and that passive RL should not be attributed to Confucianism, not only because Confucius’ learning principles do not show a preference for passive RL, but also because passive RL strategies are not compatible with the traits of Chinese EFL learners as confirmed in this study. The overview of the history of the Chinese education system presented in this study suggests that, where CHC learners do make passive use of RL, this is more likely to be attributable to *keju*, the Imperial Examination System than to Confucianism. Furthermore, the researcher in this study addresses the changes which have happened within the Chinese education system (see Chapter 2).

Thirdly, a recognition of the value of active Confucian-based MSs is of benefit to both Confucian heritage and Western learners.

The findings of this study suggest that it is important to enhance the confidence of Chinese learners from mainland China and that cultural heritage and uniqueness should be identified, protected, respected and continue to be used. Chinese people constitute more than one-quarter of the world's population. As discussed in Chapter One, as the most populous country in the world, China also boasts one of the largest populations of English learners and a long history of English teaching and learning (Rao 1996:458). A recognition of the benefits of the deep memorisation strategies used by CHC learners will enable these learners to combine these MSs with other approaches to teaching and learning such as the use of communicative strategies. Thus the strength of one culture's approach to learning can be combined with the strength of another's, and Chinese learners' positive beliefs about RL, as it is understood with CHC cultures, can be seen as an advantage to their learning.

It is important to realise that Chinese national cultural heritage should not be simply labeled as "old-fashioned" or "inferior" in comparison with that of other countries. Cortazzi cautions against such cultural imperialisms, stating "there is no reason to suppose that one culture of learning is superior to another..." (1996:174, quoted from Kennedy 2002:442).

6.3 Implications for future research

The findings in this study have suggested some implications which might be considered for future research, and which are of significance to educators and policy-makers as well as to researchers. For the convenience of discussion, these implications will be presented in two main aspects---the implications which arise directly from this study for educational practice relating to the teaching, learning and examination of EFL in China and elsewhere, and recommendations for future research in aspects of Chinese EFL teaching and learning which this study has not covered, both in China and elsewhere.

6.3.1 The implications which arise directly from this study

6.3.1-1 The implication of this study for the Chinese examination system

The findings of this study from Factor Analysis and the Content Analysis identify the impact of China's examination-driven educational system on the subjects' RL approaches to EFL learning. As Wang has pointed out (2000:46-50), students learn by heart just for accuracy in exams, but this sort of accuracy does not necessarily lead to fluency in spoken English.

This indicates that this problem may be solved firstly from schools and universities in China when the emphasis on communicative competence is more overt, not just on accuracy for scores.

As reviewed in Chapter Two, the examination system in ancient China is widely blamed for affecting the success of learners working in society after graduation. The ancient Civil Service examination tested the ability to memorise classical works, which led Chinese learners to rely heavily on memorisation for examinations. Such a system only required repeating information rather than solving problems. Thus, Chinese learners are usually characterised as hard-working and diligent but lacking in creativity and originality, and examination system produces learners with high scores but low problem-solving skills.

A review of the literature (e.g. Kennedy 2002; Lucas 2000; Martinsons & Martinsons, 1996; Rao 1996, Cheung 2000) suggests that there is an imbalance within the Chinese examination system, between knowledge and ability, and that it is knowledge, rather than ability, that is being tested. This view is strengthened by the findings of this study, which were addressed in Chapter 4, 4.1.5-(2) from Factor Analysis and Chapter 5, the Content Analysis on the subjects' beliefs about focusing their attention on completing vocabulary exercises repeatedly to meet the exam requirements. The subjects in this study also feel worried that "much of our time spent on memorising accurate answers through RL just for examination high scores may limit our time to do more creative tasks." This indicates that the exams test knowledge of vocabulary rather than the ability to use it effectively. However, a recognition of active Confucian-based MSs from the findings of this study has suggested some possible ways leading to reforms to the exams so that they would test learners' active application of their knowledge.

As discussed throughout the study, the term “active Confucian-based MSs” suggested by the researcher is a combination of MSs: repetition, memorisation, practice, including reviewing and understanding rather than mere repetition or memorisation. As a first step, the exam paper designer could attempt to discover what strategies the students are actually using as profitable information for designing the paper. The designers might also take into account of the practical need in social development to provide students with chances to solving problems. What is learnt through repetition or memorisation as *accurate* knowledge might be tested in a variety of testing methods such as recognising different meaning in specific contexts through multiple choice, answering questions based on given materials or writing essays on required topics, requirements of achievements from pair or group work, making real situational conversations etc. to invoke reactions and communicative competence. A promising idea suggested by Li (2000) is that what is learnt through intensive reading in class can be tested by listening, speaking, writing and translating in which high input may result in high output. Li’s view provides insight into the significance of this possibility of testing students’ acquisition of knowledge in a more flexible way. However, the fact that active Confucian-based MSs identified in this study is an indication that Chinese EFL students with CHCs have already used a variety of learning strategies for the purpose of knowledge acquisition, consolidation and practice. This perception may help EFL exam paper designers to improve the designing of test paper and in turn students may be provided with opportunities to refine and add to their learning strategies so that they become as efficient as possible. Thus, a recognition of active Confucian-based MSs might enable exam paper designers profitably discover what strategies the students are actually using so that

the examination system might be modified to test these active processes, rather than testing passive memorisation.

The question is, can the situation of being examination slaves for both teachers and students be changed? That is the challenge that faces all those involved in Chinese education today (Su 1998:39). Although change may be slow in the education system, the introduction of communicative strategies, and the reconciliation of the strategies between East and West, including a recognition of the value of active Confucian-based MSs may enable Chinese learners to develop both accuracy and fluency in English.

Currently, educational programmes in mainland China place a stronger emphasis on achievement motivation than educational programmes in the past, or in present-day Taiwan. Efforts are directed towards training children to become active, self-reliant, competent, intellectually critical, and achievement oriented (Ho 1986:36).

6.3.1-2 The implications of this study for Chinese EFL teaching in the UK

A study conducted by Cutting & Li (2001) looked at the extent to which EAP (English for Academic Purposes) lecturers should vary their teaching approach according to the nationality of the student, focusing on classes of predominantly Chinese students. The study asked whether, in the light of an influx all over Britain of students from China, EAP teachers should be sensitive to their cultural and educational values and academic traditions, or whether they should keep to their communicative approach and interactive teaching methods.

Cutting & Li (2001) concluded with suggestions that British teachers in the UK should remind themselves and their Chinese students of the Chinese saying about

moving on, “Make the past serve the present and foreign things serve China”. They emphasise a *two*-way process. The findings of this study suggest a particular way in which the past (Chinese cultural heritage) can serve the present (use of active Confucian-based MSs) in the context of an interactive classroom. Likewise, communicative strategies in the West and active Confucian-based MSs identified in the present study can complement each other and support each other, because both strategies demonstrate insufficiency in embracing many more important learning and teaching approaches both in China and in the UK, such as memorising accurate knowledge and interacting flexibly in real life.

6.3.2 Recommendations for future research

6.3.2-1 RL is not the only memory strategy used in learning English vocabulary in China

If there is a question “Is RL the only memory strategy used in learning English vocabulary in China?” The answer to it will certainly be No. The results suggest that Chinese EFL learners prefer RL strategies, but at the same time never reject other MSs. Factor 1 of the subjects’ beliefs about their memory strategy use obtained from Factor Analysis in Chapter 4 revealed that the items on this factor are of a group of MSs, including *mental linkages, applying images and sounds*. The results of Part 1 of the interview also indicate that *RL* was also placed at the 5th, 7th and 9th position in the rank ordering, although the teacher questionnaires, in fact, show the subjects’ No.

1 preference for *RL*. These findings have a significant implication for the possibility of investigating one of the other strategies, and in particular the relationship between these strategies and learners' cultural background. Future research might investigate more factors affecting Chinese EFL learners' approaches to English vocabulary learning and the different memory strategies (MSs) which may play different roles for different learners.

6.3.2-2. There might be other reasons to explain the use of RL in China

The findings suggest that we can no longer assume that it is satisfactory to seek explanations only from a cultural perspective for the use of RL in China.

According to Oxford's (1990) synthesis of existing research, eight factors should be considered, influencing the choice of L2 learning strategies:

Motivation

Gender

Cultural background

Attitudes and beliefs

Type of task

Age and L2 stage

Learning style

Tolerance of ambiguity

These eight factors can serve as food for thought in the study of the learning strategies used by Chinese EFL learners. The present study was mainly involved with

two of the aspects above--- cultural background, attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, the other factors affecting Chinese EFL learners need to be considered in a further study.

6.3.2-3 The implications of this study for EFL teachers in China

Yao (2001) has pointed out that for years there have been American/British teachers in China, teaching English to both English majors and non-majors. What has puzzled these guest teachers is that students complain that teachers from the USA/UK do not teach them how to pass examinations. As a result, more and more students are found absent from the class, and are then found to be attending Chinese teachers' classes, where the teachers not only systematically teach new words and require students to memorise them, but also teach students methods of memorising them. Cortazzi and Jin (1996:164) emphasise that "It is worth pondering why it is that many students prefer Chinese teachers for vocabulary learning". The findings of this study suggest that teachers are highly respected and students are learning cooperatively and actively. The students trust their teachers and believe that "It must be a good method if it is beneficial for knowledge acquisition". The only explanation for those native speaker teachers' ineffective teaching may be because they are not trained. Actually many well-trained native English-speaking teachers do very well in the Chinese settings.

Nowadays, some strategies for EFL teaching and learning which are very popular in the West work very well in China, such as English corners, group work, speech competitions and the use of video recordings. Cortazzi and Jin (1996:164) also propose: "It is worth asking if methodological innovations would help students pass their exams". However, the reform of teaching methodology does not necessarily go

hand in hand with a change of teachers' beliefs, especially where these are closely linked to cultural heritage. Williams & Burden (1997:207) point out:

What teachers do in the classroom will reflect their own beliefs and attitudes. Even if a country or an institution adopts a communicative syllabus and course books, what actually goes on in the classroom will reflect a combination of teachers' and learners' beliefs about learning the language and the ultimate purpose of education, as well as the unique way in which a particular lesson is socially constructed by teacher and learners.

It would be beneficial to study Chinese EFL teachers' beliefs about the reform of educational programmes in China, because teachers' beliefs about what learning is will affect everything that they do in the classroom, whether these beliefs are implicit or explicit (Williams & Burden 1997:56-57). A study of Chinese teachers' use of communicative teaching and learning strategies for EFL should be integrated with their use of active Confucian-based MSs and how Chinese students continue to use them.

6.3.2-4 A further area of interest for future research would be the motivation of Chinese EFL learners

As mentioned in Chapter One, Oxford (1994) summarised eight factors affecting language learning strategies. Motivation was identified as one of these factors.

More motivated students tended to use more strategies than less motivated students, and the particular reason for studying the language (motivational orientation, especially as related to career field) was important in the choice of strategies (Oxford, 1994:2).

It would be of particular benefit to compare integrative and instrumental motivation in Chinese EFL learners. Norris (2001:1) states that integrative motivation is characterised by the learner's positive attitudes towards the target language group and desire to integrate into the target language community. Instrumental motivation underlies the goal to gain some social, academic or economic reward through L2/FL achievement, and relates to a more functional reason for language learning. The findings of the present study suggest that the current requirements of the Chinese examination system tend to lead to instrumental rather than integrative motivation among Chinese EFL learners. However, a changing situation such as working in China-foreign joint-venture enterprises within China or beyond China or settling in foreign countries may lead to higher integrative motivation. There might be a shift from instrumental motivation to integrative motivation, which might lead to some changes in MSs choice and usage. The comparison of the impact of instrumental and integrative motivations on Chinese EFL learners in relation to different cultural contexts would be worth studying.

6.3.2-5 There might be some cultural similarities and differences between Chinese EFL learners in mainland China and Hong Kong

Chinese EFL Learners of mainland China and Hong Kong are of the same descendants of the People's Republic of China. However, Hong Kong as a British colony maintained its colonial status for 156 years (1841-1997), during which time it straddled two empires and two worlds. Hong Kong's transition to Chinese rule was officially sealed in 1984, when Beijing and London signed a Joint Declaration. "One country, two systems" was Deng Xiaoping's vision of how the mainland would

manage Hong Kong. In the words of the 1984 Basic Law, “the previous capitalist system and the way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years”.

It was seven years since the formal handover of Hong Kong in 1997, and the impact of this change in administration on the teaching and learning of EFL would make an interesting focus for further research.

The characteristics of Chinese learners with CHCs and particular problems concerning pedagogical practice in Hong Kong are being increasingly addressed. The findings of this study suggest that the impact of CHSs on Hong Kong students is similar to that on mainland Chinese students. However, far less attention has been paid to systematically investigating the differences caused by this particular situation between Chinese EFL learners in vocabulary learning in Hong Kong and mainland China. It would be interesting to investigate the differences in cultural experience between Hong Kong and mainland China over the last 150 years, and the effect these differences might have had on approaches to teaching and learning, as well as the ways in which Hong Kong’s re-assimilation into China might bring about changes in teaching and learning including the examination system. Research in this area will offer a contribution to the study of Chinese EFL learners’ beliefs about the influence of centuries-old CHCs on how they handle vocabulary learning.

6.3.2-6 There might be some gender differences in the use of RL among Chinese EFL learners

According to Sheorey (1999), in general, researchers have reported that female learners use strategies more often than male learners (e.g. Oxford et al., 1988; Oxford and Nyikos, 1989; Oxford, 1993; Green and Oxford, 1995) and as Green and Oxford point out (1995, p.291) “...gender difference trends in strategy use are quite

pronounced *within and across cultures*, and this means that women and men are using different approaches to language learning...”.

A common perception in China is that females use more RL than males, although there is no data as yet to provide evidence in this regard. When studying perceived sex differences in intelligence in China, Chan (1996:100) explains the cause of the apparent imbalance between the genders in terms of patriarchy within the family structure in old China. As he points out, educational opportunities and the intellectual development of females have been severely constrained up to recent times, and women have traditionally only played a minor role in most Chinese communities. Chan’s findings demonstrated: no sex differences in the intelligence scores, but he found that Chinese boys in mainland China have higher verbal and visual-spatial abilities, whereas girls are superior in memory. He found girls in Hong Kong to be consistently superior to boys in both Chinese and English language. It would be interesting to investigate the effect of these gender differences on their learning strategies.

In the old male-dominated Chinese society before 1949, the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, females were trained in the three obediences, *san cong si de*, (to father before marriage, to husband after marriage, and to son after the death of husband) and the four virtues (morality, proper speech, modest manner and diligent work). These were further reinforced by common sayings such as, *nu zi wu cai bian shi de*, which means “It is a virtue for women not to have talent”, implying that intelligence in women may be a handicap. Ignorance and submissiveness were all that was required of a good wife or a good mother (Chan 1996:100). Although great changes have taken place since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 (exemplified by the late Chairman Mao’s encouragement to women in

China with statements such as, “The times are different”. “Males and females should be treated in the same way”. “Male and female are equal, and females could hold half the sky”), the traditional concept of male and female roles still exists. This is of special relevance in the discussion of cultural influence on Chinese EFL learners in relation to gender differences. It would be worth a study of males’ and females’ use of RL to find out if Chinese EFL learners believe or behave differently in using memory strategies because of the gender differences.

6.3.3 Summary

In summary, this study raises some issues for further research. As mentioned at the outset of this section, these implications have been discussed in two main aspects with altogether eight sub-headings for the suggested areas for further research. These include modifying the Chinese examination system in consideration of the findings in this study “active Confucian-based MSs” and taking account of the cultural background of Chinese EFL learners when they are in the UK; the possibilities of exploring more MSs used by Chinese EFL learners besides RL and the relationship between their beliefs and their preferred strategies; exploring more factors to affecting the use of MSs; considering the value of Chinese EFL teachers’ pedagogical approaches in China; the possible benefit of studying the impact of Chinese EFL learners’ motivations on their beliefs about choice of MSs; the possibility of investigating the cultural similarities and differences between Chinese EFL learners in Hong Kong and mainland China in order to further identify the influence of CHCs on Chinese EFL learners’ beliefs about their preference of learning strategies; and, finally considering a study of gender differences in the use

of RL among Chinese EFL learners which will be helpful for pedagogical reforms in China.

This study has focused specially on Chinese EFL learners' beliefs about the role of RL in vocabulary learning.

This study suggests that this exploration of EFL learners' beliefs and analysis of RL may have a favourable impact on memory strategies. The researcher would like to recommend that the approaches be replicated in other EFL countries with Confucian heritage cultures or other different cultural backgrounds.

The researcher would like to end this thesis with Jiang's (2002) speech at Harvard University with respect to the international cultural perspective: "Every country and every nation has its own historical and cultural traditions, strong points and advantages. We should respect and learn from each other and draw upon others' strong points to offset our own deficiencies for achieving common progress".

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APPENDIX 1**VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES
QUESTIONNAIRE****Directions (in English)**

The VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES QUESTIONNAIRE (VLSQ) is designed to gather information about how you, as a Chinese learner of English, go about learning and memorising vocabulary. On the following pages you will find statements related to the acquisition of vocabulary items. Please read each statement carefully.

You are required to rate each statement on a 5-point scale by circling one of the responses (1,2,3,4 or 5) to indicate your beliefs about the statement and what you actually do when you are dealing with English words.

1. strongly agree
2. agree
3. no opinion
4. disagree
5. strongly disagree

Strongly agree means that you almost always behave as described in the statement.

Agree means that you behave as described in the statement more than half of the time.

No opinion means that you are not sure of using the strategies when you are learning vocabulary and can not tell.

Disagree means that you behave as described less than half the time, but more than in very rare instances.

Strongly disagree means that you behave as described in the statement only in very rare instances.

Please complete the VLSQ as seriously as possible. There are no right or wrong responses to these statements. The researcher is simply interested in your opinions.

Please ignore the small numbers in parenthesis---these are simply to help the researcher when analysing the questionnaire.

There is a glossary appended to this questionnaire for your reference.

I would like to thank you very much for your co-operation.

Beliefs about vocabulary learning

(Please circle your answer)

- 1.strongly agree
- 2.agree
- 3.no opinion
- 4.disagree
- 5.strongly disagree

disagree

Rote learning: (1)

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.Vocabulary should be learnt through repetition. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2.Rote learning is an effective way to memorise words. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3.English words have fixed meanings. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4.Word lists, charts or cards are very helpful in memorising words. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5.The translation equivalents of Chinese and English are helpful when a new word appears. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Creating mental linkages: (2)

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6.Words should be acquired in context. (e.g. guessing, pick up naturally.) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7.Organized material is easier to store in and retrieve from long-term memory. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Applying images and sounds: (3)

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8.Words can be remembered very quickly by mentally picturing the situation.(e.g.the word <i>seagull</i> , a seagull flying in the sky) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9.Semantic mapping is valuable for remembering more words. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10.Keyword method should be used. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Reviewing well: (4)

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11.Reviewing often is very helpful. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12.Structured reviewing is only useful before exams. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

(Please circle your answer)

- 1.strongly agree
- 2.agree
- 3.no opinion
- 4.disagree
- 5.strongl disagree

Vocabulary learning strategies

13. I make vocabulary lists of new words that I meet. (1) 1 2 3 4 5
14. I write the new words on one side of a card and their explanations on the other side. (1) 1 2 3 4 5
- 15 I keep the vocabulary lists of new words that I make.(1) 1 2 3 4 5
- 16 I go through my vocabulary list several times until I am sure that I do not have any words on that list that I still don't understand.(1) 1 2 3 4 5
17. I make vocabulary cards and take them with me wherever I go.(1) 1 2 3 4 5
18. I make regular and structured reviews of new words I have memorised.(4) 1 2 3 4 5
19. When I try to memorise a word, I repeat it aloud to myself. (1) 1 2 3 4 5
20. When I try to remember a word, I write it repeatedly.(1) 1 2 3 4 5
21. I do oral spelling exercises with my classmate or anyone whose English level is at a similar level of mine.(1) 1 2 3 4 5
22. I write both the English new words and their Chinese equivalent repeatedly in order to remember them.(1) 1 2 3 4 5
23. I focus my attention on completing vocabulary exercises repeatedly when the exams are coming.(1) 1 2 3 4 5
24. I compose sentences with the words I am studying.(2) 1 2 3 4 5
25. I recall words by pair checking with someone else.(4) 1 2 3 4 5
26. I group words by grammatical class (e.g. by parts of speech).(2)1 2 3 4 5
27. I can use words correctly and efficiently after memorising them.(1)1 2 3 4 5
28. I memorise examples in some context when using the words.(2)1 2 3 4 5
29. I remember a group of new words that share similar letters in spelling.(e.g. big,

bag,bug) (2)

1 2 3 4 5

(Please circle your answer)

1.strongly agree

2.agree

3.no opinion

4.disagree

5.strongl disagree

30. I associate the sound of the word with the same sound of a similar word in English.(3)

1 2 3 4 5

31. I associate new words with words that sound similar in Chinese(3)1 2 3 4 5

32. I read a series of texts on a related topic to be exposed to vocabulary that is repeated frequently.(2)

1 2 3 4 5

33 I break up the word into components (e.g.roots, prefixes)(2)

1 2 3 4 5

34. I group words into categories (e.g., animals, utensils, vegetables, etc.)(2)

1 2 3 4 5

35. When I meet a new word, I search in my memory and see if I have any synonyms and antonyms in my memory stock.(2)

1 2 3 4 5

36. I visualise the spelling of the word in my head.(3)

1 2 3 4 5

37. I remember one dictionary definition for the meaning of a word.(1)1 2 3 4 5

38. I make sure I understand what I am studying. (1)

1 2 3 4 5

39. I pay attention to set phrases and collocations that go with a word.(1)

1 2 3 4 5

40. I use the rote learning strategies (e.g. repetition; paired words dictionary for definitions) all the time since I began to learn English. (1)

1 2 3 4 5

This section offers you, the learner the opportunity to give your opinions on VLSs. (Please express yourself in your own words either in English or Chinese. Your views will be very valuable to the research.)

1.What are the most effective strategies that you believe produce the better results when you are using to learn vocabulary?

2.What do you think of rote learning for Chinese learners in VLSs?

3.Do you have any other strategies for either learning or memorising vocabulary? (Please specify).

APPENDIX 2**Questionnaire to Chinese EFL teachers**

Dear sir/madam,

I am writing for your help.

This is a PhD study on the role of rote learning in EFL vocabulary learning strategies: an analysis of Chinese learners of English. It is still in a very rough state. I have enclosed the results of the study and I wish to get your comments/critical ideas, so that I might generalise and confirm the study.

Your early reply will be highly appreciated. I will be very grateful if you could send the completed form back to the following address:

Xiuping Li c/o Dr Joan Cutting,
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Room 104
Foster Building
Chester Road
University of Sunderland
Sunderland SR1 3SD
UK
Yours sincerely

Xiuping Li

P.S. Your comments will be of great value and assistance to the completion of the present study. Thank you in advance!

Would you please put your name and working place on your answer sheet if you do not mind.?

The findings of the study indicate that Chinese learners of English generally hold highly positive attitudes towards rote learning (RL). They also indicate that the basic

knowledge gained through RL forms a basis for advanced learning strategies and RL is effective in the higher stages of language learning as well as the initial stages. In conclusion, although there continues to be a reliance on RL in China due to the factors such as Chinese cultural background; EFL environment; Traditional habit; Examination demand; Chinese linguistic background/the way of learning mother tongue and the benefits of this strategy to the Chinese learners in particular can not be ignored (e.g. psychological comfort; deepening the understanding). What is more interesting, the subjects' perceptions suggest that RL is an effective way in learning vocabulary, but not the best way.

Would you please fill in the blanks with your comments on the presented results?

1.Chinese EFL learners believe to use more rote learning than any other memory strategies. Is it true? Why?

2.Rote learning suits Chinese learners best to memorise vocabulary. What do you think?

3.Rote learning works better than other memory strategies in China. Do you agree?

4.Rote learning is effective in vocabulary learning and it is helpful for all the learners at all stages---from beginners to the advanced learners. Please comment on this statement.

5.Would you please talk about your attitudes towards rote learning for Chinese EFL learners in China? Examples/evidence are more preferable.

APPENDIX 3

Interview Schedule

Name of interviewee:

Venue:

Stage/Grade (Class):

Date of interview:

Directions:

I would like to talk to you about your own English vocabulary learning strategies.

Your name and your opinions will be kept in complete confidence and will not affect anyone's opinion about you. I am simply interested in your opinions.

If you don't mind, I'd like to take notes and tape our conversation as an aid to memory for myself.

Part 1

Here are 10 statements/comments that some learners have made about vocabulary learning strategies. Would you please number the statements/comments presented below from 1 to 10 according to your preferred strategies? (Please ignore the numbers at the end of each sentence, which are simply to help the researcher in analysis).

- 1() Making up vocabulary cards/lists and memorising them are useful for both learners at the initial stages and higher stages. (1)
- 2() Using Chinese equivalents in understanding English. (1)
- 3() Remembering a new word by a combination of sounds and images. (3)
- 4() Getting definitions from a dictionary for accuracy. (1)
- 5() Reading and writing words many times. (1)
- 6() Guessing the meanings of words in context. (2)
- 7() Remembering words by grouping into categories. (2)
- 8() Using keywords for memorisation. (3)
- 9() Using semantic mapping to enlarge vocabulary.(3)
- 10() Remembering words by reviewing often. (4)

Part 2

Thank you very much for numbering the above statements/comments. Would you please help me with a few more questions?

1. Which vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) do you think Chinese learners use the most and why?

(prompt if no response to the VLSs: repetition; paired words; in context; grouping; associating, keyword, etc. For what reason: habitual styles, cultural elements, heavy pressure of the exams for accuracy, etc.)

2. Have you ever thought about getting rid of rote learning if it is traditional? Why?

3. Which kinds of strategies can help you personally become a better English learner?

4. What do you think of the relationship between rote learning and the other three large categories of memory strategies as mentioned previously?

5. Which kinds of strategies do you think are all useful for learners at different levels of English?

APPENDIX 4**VOCABULARY TEST****Name:****Stage/Grade (Class):****Date:****Instructions**

This test is designed only for the researcher's analysis in the field study. The test results have absolutely no influence on your marks record.

Please do not use a dictionary in this test. You are required to take 40 to 60 minutes for the paper.

Read each question carefully before you answer.

There are 100 questions in this test and there should be one mark for each correct answer. Please do as well as you can.

Thank you very much for your co-operation.

Part 1 Definitions (30%)

Match up the definitions on the left (1-10) with the correct idiom on the right (a-j).
(10%)

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. clever, intelligent | a. all thumbs |
| 2. inquisitive, curious | b. brainy |
| 3. rich, wealthy | c. cheeky |
| 4. cruel | d. heartless |
| 5. ill, not well | e. long in the tooth |
| 6. young, inexperienced | f. nosy |
| 7. old (of a person) | g. off colour |
| 8. very clumsy, awkward | h. black and blue all over |
| 9. impudent | i. Well off |
| 10. covered with bruises | j. wet behind the ears |

Please provide either a Chinese equivalent, a synonym or paraphrase of the following words. (20%)

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. acrobat | 2. bacteria |
| 3. circus | 4. donate |
| 5. eloquence | 6. fragrance |
| 7. gorgeous | 8. haughty |
| 9. immense | 10. juvenile |
| 11. kangaroo | 12. leopard |
| 13. malicious | 14. obligation |
| 15. precaution | 16. solidarity |
| 17. tedious | 18. vanish |
| 19. yacht | 20. zeal |

Part 2 Complete the proverbs (10%)

Complete the following proverbs by choosing an ending from those marked a-j.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Absence... | a. ...begins at home |
| 2. Beauty... | b. ...spoil the broth |
| 3. When the cat's away... | c. ...is the mother of invention |
| 4. No news... | d. ...makes the heart grow fonder |
| 5. Charity... | e. ...sweeps clean |
| 6. Practice... | f. ...there is a way |
| 7. Necessity... | g. ...is only skin deep |
| 8. A new broom... | h. ...the mice will play |
| 9. Too many cooks... | i. ...makes perfect |
| 10. Where there is a will... | j. ...is good news |

Part 3 Collocations (10%)

Please put each word from the following list in its correct space in the sentences below.

all-out	pitch	dog	dire	blank	rock
wide	paper	flat	crystal		

- I was-----tired after such a hard day's work.
- It was-----dark. I couldn't see a thing.
- The sea near those rocks is-----clear.
- Sorry, I can't lend you anything. I am-----broke.
- The neighbours hear everything we say. The walls are-----thin.
- It was 2 a.m. but I was still-----awake.

7. Those starving people are in-----need of food.
8. I had last heard of her in Australia 20 years before. When she walked in, I looked at her in-----amazement.
9. The fighting is escalating rapidly. Soon it will be-----war.
10. Prices have been falling rapidly. When they reach-----bottom, I'll buy.

Part 4 Word formation (30%)

Fill each space in the sentences below with the correct form of the word in bold print above it.(10%)

E.g. **decide**
 We must come to a-----very soon.
 Answers: decision

1. beauty

They're going to-----the town with more trees and parks.

2. pay

Please make your cheque-----to John Watson.

3. receive

I made several suggestions to improve production, but the management was not very-----to my ideas.

4. hero

He received a medal for his-----.

5. produce

China is one of the world's leading-----of rice.

6. explain

An-----leaflet is given to all purchasers of the machine.

7. compare

This is-----better than that. In fact, there is really no-----.

8. admire

She was a pleasant, attractive girl, always surrounded by-----.

9. reside

Buckingham Palace is the Queen's official-----in London.

10. famous

The-----of the Beatles soon spread outside Britain.

Read the meanings of the following 'portmanteau' words (e.g. 'smog' is a combination of 'smoke' and 'fog') and then put each in its correct sentence below.(5%)

brunch motel Oxfam Oxbridge Eurovision

- 1.The-----Song Contest is watched by millions of viewers from Portugal to Finland, from Greece to Iceland, and in other countries.
- 2 The-----organisation, which has the aim of relieving hunger throughout the world, was founded in Oxford.
- 3 If you get up late at the weekend, you might decide to have-----.
- 4 After driving all day, we looked for a cheap, clean-----to stop at for the night.
- 5 In the past a university degree from-----was a great advantage to anyone wanting a career in the diploma service.

arch- out- mal- fore- neo-

Put each of the above prefixes in its correct space in the sentences below.(5%)

1. Although he was older than his wife, he-----lived her for by ten years.
- 2.Priests are not often ambitious men, but he had set his heart on becoming-----bishop.
3. Children who grow up in time of war are more likely to be-----adjusted than other children.
4. The British Museum was built in the middle of the last century in the-----classical style popular at that time.
5. Who can-----tell what the future holds for us?

-cide -some -worthy -like -monger

Put each of the above suffixes in its correct place in the sentences below.(5%)

1. Those rose-bushes need protection. Spray them with insecti-----.
2. A person who makes and exploits war is called a war-----.
- 3.A small accident like that won't appear in the papers. It isn't news-----enough.
4. In the old days it was not considered lady-----for a woman to smoke in public, if at all.
5. I have a backache which is a bit trouble-----at times.

Put the words in brackets into the sentences, in the same order, in their plural forms.(5%)

1. A large number of-----fled in fear when a flock of-----suddenly landed within a few feet of them. (mouse; goose;)
2. Security-----believe the thieves climbed along the-----of several houses before forcing open an upper window of the office building with knives and escaping with the contents of the two----- . (chief; roof, safe)

Part 5 Words discrimination (20%)

Choose the correct word for each space.

1. misused/disused

An airport-----since its closure ten years before was used for car-racing.

2. unreadable/illegible

His handwriting is so bad it's-----

3. story/storey

The basic -----of the novel is rather weak but it's amusing and well-written.

4 historic/historical

Today we have gained our independence and our liberty. It is a-----day for our country.

5. disinterested/uninterested

Only 22% of the people voted. The rest were totally-----.

6. fall/fell/felled

Three old trees will have to be-----because they are diseased and dangerous.

7. find/found/founded

My grandmother-----this firm in 1942.

8. bind/bound/bounded

The lion-----forward and sprang at her.

9. saw/sawed/seen

He-----the branch in half and put the pieces on the fire.

10. lay/laid

He ----the enormous box on the ground and looked for a taxi.

11. bore/born/borne

The winning team were-----through the streets on the shoulders of their excited supporters.

12. loaded/laden

a. The table was-----with good things. It was a real feast.

13. cost/costed

The proposed new road system has been-----by experts at #73,000,000.

14. hung/hanged

When you've-----your coat up, come and sit down.

15. struck/stricken

Thousands of people have been-----by this terrible illness.

16. actual/present

I've known many rich men, but he is the only-----millionaire I've met.

17. morale/moral

As we became aware of the difficulties that lay ahead, our-----dropped.

18. corps/corpse

The -----was examined by a pathologist to determine the cause of death.

19. On the contrary/On the other hand

Yes, it's a very cosmopolitan city. -----, it is very expensive.

20. Critic/review

She was the book-----of a literary magazine.

APPENDIX 4.1

From Watcyn-Jones, P. (1990)

1 Definitions 1

Match up the definitions on the left (1-16) with the correct idiom on the right (a-p).

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 clever, intelligent | a all thumbs |
| 2 inquisitive, curious | b bedridden |
| 3 rich, wealthy | c highbanded |
| 4 cruel | d black and blue all over |
| 5 stupid, unintelligent | e brainy |
| 6 young, inexperienced | f cheeky |
| 7 old (of a person) | g hair-raising |
| 8 very clumsy, awkward | h heartless |
| 9 impudent | i keyed up |
| 10 stubborn | j long in the tooth |
| 11 too weak to leave one's bed | k rosy |
| 12 terrifying | l off colour |
| 13 conceited, vain, boastful | m pigheaded |
| 14 tense, excited | n thick |
| 15 ill, not well | o wall off |
| 16 covered with bruises | p wet behind the ears |

34 Complete the proverbs 2

Complete the following proverbs by choosing an ending from those marked a-p. Then try to explain what each proverb means.

- 1 Absence ...
- 2 Beauty ...
- 3 First come, ...
- 4 When the cat's away ...
- 5 No news ...
- 6 A miss ...
- 7 One good turn ...
- 8 A bird in the hand ...
- 9 A bad workman ...
- 10 Charity ...
- 11 Practice ...
- 12 Necessity ...
- 13 A new broom ...
- 14 One man's meat ...
- 15 Too many cooks ...
- 16 Where there's a will ...

- a ... is worth two in the bush.
- b ... begins at home.
- c ... is as good as a mile.
- d ... spoil the broth.
- e ... is the mother of invention.
- f ... makes the heart grow fonder.
- g ... always blames his tools.
- h ... sweeps clean.
- i ... there's a way.
- j ... is only skin deep.
- k ... the mice will play.
- l ... deserves another.
- m ... first served.
- n ... makes perfect.
- o ... is good news.
- p ... is another man's poison.

Write your answers here:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16

APPENDIX 4.2

From Thomas, B. J. (1991)

WORD FORMATION

Word Forms

Fill each space in the sentences below with the correct form of the word in bold print above it.

E.g. **decide**

- (a) We must come to a _____ very soon.
 (b) We beat them _____. We won 7-0.
 (c) He can never make up his mind. He's very _____.

Answers: (a) decision
 (b) decisively
 (c) indecisive

1 **beauty**

- (a) She is very _____.
 (b) She's training to be a _____.
 (c) They're going to _____ the town with more trees and parks.

2 **pay**

- (a) To buy this car I made a monthly _____ of £290 for two years.
 (b) Please make your cheque _____ to John Watson.
 (c) The person a cheque is made out to is called the _____.

3 **receive**

- (a) She works as a _____ at a hotel in Scotland.
 (b) Ask for a _____ when you buy something, in case you need to return it.
 (c) I made several suggestions to improve production, but the management was not very _____ to my ideas.

4 **hero**

- (a) He received a medal for his _____.
 (b) They fought _____ in the war.
 (c) She was described as a _____.

5 **produce**

- (a) _____ of the new sports car has been halted by a strike.
 (b) China is one of the world's leading _____ of rice.
 (c) I'm afraid the talks were totally _____. We didn't reach agreement on anything.

6 **explain**

- (a) An _____ leaflet is given to all purchasers of the machine.
 (b) His disappearance is very strange, in fact quite _____.
 (c) I think you owe me an _____ for your behaviour.

7 **compare**

- (a) This is _____ better than that, in fact, there is really no _____.
 (b) Scientists have made _____ tests on the new drugs.

8 **advise**

- (a) Until the situation has settled down, it is _____ to travel to that country.
 (b) The government set up an _____ body on the use of drugs in sport.
 (c) I doubt the _____ of drinking alcohol while undergoing that medical treatment.

38 destroy

- (a) The control centre is deep underground and completely _____ except by a direct hit from a nuclear missile.
 (b) War plans include the immediate _____ of all enemy military bases.
 (c) His criticism of my work was entirely _____. There was nothing useful or constructive in it at all.

39 manage

- (a) Talks between workers and _____ have broken down and a strike now seems unavoidable.
 (b) The boy was very violent and his parents found him _____.
 (c) To improve his qualifications he's taking a course in _____ skills.

40 believe

- (a) It was an incredible story, quite _____.
 (b) She is a person of very strong religious _____.
 (c) His explanation was obviously false and the judge made no attempt to hide his _____.

Portmanteau Words

Certain English words are formed by combining parts of two words, often the first part of one and the last part of another (e.g. 'smog' is a combination of 'smoke' and 'fog') and sometimes the two first parts (e.g. a 'moped' is a 'motorized, pedal-assisted bicycle'). Explain the meanings of the following 'portmanteau' words and then put each in its correct sentence below.

Swatch
bedsit
Chunnel

brunch
Oxbridge

motel
Interpol

Oxfam
Eurovision

- (a) The _____ Song Contest is watched by millions of viewers from Portugal to Finland, from Greece to Iceland, and in other countries.
 (b) The _____ organization, which has the aim of relieving hunger throughout the world, was founded in Oxford.
 (c) The International Police Commission, with headquarters in Paris, is usually referred to as _____.
 (d) If you get up late at the week-end, you might decide to have _____ in the middle of the morning.
 (e) The British and French governments have taken the first steps towards building a _____ to link the two countries.
 (f) After driving all day, we looked for a cheap, clean _____ to stop at for the night.
 (g) In the past a university degree from _____ was a great advantage to anyone wanting a career in the diplomatic service.
 (h) There's a certain kind of Swiss watch called a _____.
 (i) She can't afford a proper flat. She rents a _____.

Prefixes

1 **arch-** (chief, main, highest-ranking) **out-** (more, better etc. than) **mal-** (badly, wrongly) **pseudo-** (false, pretended)
Put each of the above prefixes in its correct space in the sentences below.

- In my opinion this book is just _____-intellectual rubbish.
- Although he was older than his wife, he _____lived her by ten years.
- Priests are not often ambitious men, but he had set his heart on becoming _____bishop.
- The launch of the space-rocket was delayed by a _____function in the fuel system.
- At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain's _____-enemy was France.
- He completely _____boxed his opponent and knocked him out in the seventh round.
- Children who grow up in time of war are more likely to be _____adjusted than other children.
- He uses _____-scientific language to persuade his readers.
- These squalid, dark, cramped, _____odorous rooms are homes to whole families of people.
- She was the finest dancer in the country. She _____shone all the others.

2 Explain the meanings of the following words and phrases.

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| (a) a pseudonym | (e) malnutrition |
| (b) arch-rivals | (f) pseudo-religious |
| (c) maladministration | (g) an arch-villain |
| (d) out-size clothes | (h) to outstay your welcome |

3 **a-** (not, without) **hyper-** (extremely, too)
fore- (before, in front of) **neo-** (new, revived)

- The British Museum was built in the middle of the last century in the _____-classical style popular at that time.
- Who can _____tell what the future holds for us?
- It's no use asking him about the political system or the parties. He doesn't know or care. He's completely _____political.
- It's quite normal to complain if you think something is wrong, but I do feel that you are sometimes _____critical.
- The authorities are concerned at the activities of a small _____-Nazi movement.
- You must be very careful what you say about her poems. She's a _____sensitive person.
- She didn't know the difference between right and wrong. She had no conscience at all. She was simply _____moral.
- The police claimed that she had some _____knowledge of the murder attempt and could have prevented it.
- He was standing in the middle, in the _____ground of the picture.
- Young children can sometimes be _____active, which means that they can't keep still.

Suffixes

1 -phobia (fear or hatred of) -cide (killer, killing) -gamy (marriage)

Put each of the above suffixes in its correct place in the sentences below.

- Those rose-bushes need protection. Spray them with insecti_____.
- He gets very tense and nervous in enclosed spaces like lifts and the underground. He suffers from claustro_____.
- The custom of having more than one wife or husband is known as poly_____.
- Some people, and some animals, are terrified of water. This aversion is known as aqua_____.
- His problems overwhelmed him and he finally committed sui_____.
- When he was arrested and charged with bi_____, both his wives stood by him.
- His Anglo_____ comes from some bad experiences he had in England.
- Following the man's death, his wife was charged with homi_____.

2 Explain the meanings of the following words and phrases.

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| (a) germicide | (d) a monogamous society |
| (b) xenophobia | (e) fratricide |
| (c) patricide | (f) agoraphobia |

3 -maniac (obsessed person) -phile (lover of) -monger (dealer in)

Instructions as above.

- A person who makes and exploits war is called a war_____.
- He has always been a biblio_____ and has amassed a vast collection of books over the years.
- He has a shop selling pots and pans, tools and other metal goods. He's an iron_____.
- He's unbelievably self-centred and arrogant. He's a complete ego_____.
- She loved the year she spent in Italy and has been an Italo_____ ever since.
- Some journalists are perfectly honest and well-meaning but she just makes a profit from gossip and rumour. She's just a cheap scandal_____.
- A klepto_____ is a person who has a compulsive desire to steal.
- His fondness for drink became an addiction, and his doctor says he is now a dipso_____.

4 Explain the meanings of the following words and phrases.

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| (a) a pyromaniac | (d) an Angiophile |
| (b) Francophilia | (e) a mania |
| (c) a fishmonger | (f) a film maniac |

5 -worthy (deserving, fit for) **-like** (similar to) **-most** (furthest)

- (a) To me, at 14, the film-stars I saw at my local cinema were god_____ creatures.
- (b) John O'Groats in Scotland is the northern_____ town in mainland Britain.
- (c) We are pleased to present you with this award for your praise_____ work among the poor of this city.
- (d) In the old days it was not considered lady_____ for a woman to smoke in public, if at all.
- (e) Architecture during that period was very boring. Almost every building was a box-_____ structure, with no variation or decoration to please the eye.
- (f) We're looking for an honest, reliable, trust_____ person to handle our legal affairs.
- (g) He betrayed the inner_____ secrets of his country's government to the enemy.
- (h) A small accident like that won't appear in the papers. It isn't news_____ enough.

6 Explain the meanings of the following phrases.

- (a) a business-like manner
- (b) his foremost thought
- (c) a roadworthy car
- (d) a noteworthy comment
- (e) a life-like statue
- (f) outermost defences

7 -wards (in the direction of) **-esque** (like, in the manner of)
-some (causing, making)

- (a) I have a backache which is a bit trouble_____ at times.
- (b) He cast his eyes heaven_____ as if imploring God for help or pity.
- (c) It's very pictur_____ here, with the trees attractively framing the view of the river.
- (d) From Colombia we went south_____ through Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia to Argentina.
- (e) Man's first view of the earth from space was an awe_____ sight.
- (f) The back garden faces sea_____ so you can always be sure of a pleasant view.
- (g) I'm afraid I find her constant chatter gets a bit wear_____ after a while.
- (h) The architecture here is rather Roman_____. Look at the round arches and thick walls.

8 Explain the meanings of the following phrases.

- (a) quarrelsome boys
- (b) outwardly confident
- (c) a statuesque figure
- (d) a downward movement
- (e) a tiresome person
- (f) a Kafkaesque novel

PROBLEM WORDS

Confusing Word Pairs

Choose the correct word for each space.

- 1 misused** (badly, wrongly used)
disused (no longer used)

- (a) An airport _____ since its closure ten years before was used for car-racing.
 (b) They complained that the new law had been _____ to suppress individual liberties.
 (c) Be careful of this word. It is often _____.
 (d) The goods were stored in a _____ cinema.

- 2 unreadable** (too boring or too badly written to read)
illegible (physically impossible to read)

- (a) His hand-writing is so bad it's _____.
 (b) The book is long, uninteresting and not very well-written. I find it _____.
 (c) After years of being exposed to the sun and rain, the sign over the shop had become completely _____.
 (d) I think her novels are _____. The style is awful and the plots are ridiculous.

- 3 dependent** (depending)

dependant (person who depends on another for home, money, food)

- (a) The signing of the contract is _____ on whether you can guarantee delivery of the goods within three months.
 (b) You are entitled to receive a government allowance for each _____ who is living with you.
 (c) This residence document permits you, but no _____ to live and work in this country.
 (d) The empire consisted of the kingdom and all its _____ colonies.

- 4 story** (tale, plot)

storey (floor or level in building)

- (a) I live in a flat on the seventh _____.
 (b) I'll tell you a _____.
 (c) The basic _____ of the novel is rather weak but it's amusing and well-written.
 (d) They're putting up a new 20-_____ hotel on this site.

- 5 historic** (important in history)

historical (concerning history)

- (a) At the meeting of our local _____ society there will be a talk on 'France in the 19th Century'.
 (b) Today we have gained our independence and our liberty. It is a _____ day for our country.
 (c) She likes _____ novels, especially romances set in the 16th and 17th centuries.
 (d) In 1945 there was a _____ meeting of world leaders which changed the course of world events.

Collocations

Certain common adjectives are sometimes emphasized, especially in colloquial language, with the addition of another adjective or noun in front of them, e.g. 'The water was **icy** cold.' 'The road was **dead** straight'. 'icy' and 'dead' in these sentences mean 'extremely' or 'absolutely'.

- 1 Put each word from the following list in its correct space in the sentences below.

wide **dog** **pitch** **brand**
stone **dirt** **stark** **bone**

- (a) I wouldn't employ him. He's _____ idle.
(b) It's an amazing price. _____ cheap!
(c) I was _____ tired after such a hard day's work.
(d) He couldn't hear a thing. He was _____ deaf.
(e) It's not second-hand. It's _____ new.
(f) This room's freezing and the window's _____ open!
(g) Here's a photo of him at three months. _____ naked.
(h) It was _____ dark. I couldn't see a thing.

- 2 Instructions as above.

fast **bone** **razor** **blind**
wide **crystal** **paper** **flat**

- (a) She had a _____ sharp mind.
(b) She went to bed at seven and she was _____ asleep by ten past.
(c) The sea near those rocks is _____ clear.
(d) There's been no rain for months and the land is _____ dry.
(e) Sorry, I can't lend you anything. I'm _____ broke.
(f) He was _____ drunk. He couldn't even walk properly.
(g) The neighbours hear everything we say. The walls are _____ thin.
(h) It was 2 a.m. but I was still _____ awake.

- 3 Certain nouns are often preceded, in the same way as the adjectives above, by adjectives (or sometimes by nouns used as adjectives) to emphasize their completeness and convey the meaning of 'extreme' or 'total'. Put each word from the following list in its correct place in the sentences below.

thin **all-out** **dire** **blank**
blind **bitter** **rock** **broad**

- (a) We'll never give up the struggle. We'll fight to the _____ end.
(b) He was never seen again. He just seemed to disappear into _____ air.
(c) Those starving people are in _____ need of food.
(d) I had last heard of her in Australia 20 years before. When she walked in, I looked at her in _____ amazement.
(e) Crime is very prevalent there. People are robbed in the street in _____ daylight.
(f) The fighting is escalating rapidly. Soon it will be _____ war.
(g) Prices have been falling rapidly. When they reach _____-bottom, I'll buy.
(h) His followers' attitude to him was nothing short of _____ devotion.

APPENDIX 5

Glossary (of key terms in this study)

The following operational terms are used throughout this study:

Beliefs: They tend to be culturally bound, to be formed early in life and to be resistant to change. (Williams & Burdens, 1997:56).

Chinese culture: The root of this culture is the influence of Confucianism, the philosophical and moral system.

Cheng Yi (1033-1107): He was one of the great Neo-Confucians of the Song Dynasty (960-1279).

Confucius: Confucius (lived 551-479BC), a native of Qufu, Shandong province, China, and is known as the first teacher in China. From him grew Confucianism. He was exalted as the Ancient Sage and Ancient Teacher, so he has been revered for over twenty centuries. The culmination of the academic thought of ages, Confucian philosophy has become the very heart of Chinese culture. Although countless dynasties have changed hands, the reverence paid to him has never waned. He is the founder of the philosophical doctrine of Confucianism. The greatest contributions made by Confucius were the editing of the *Book of Songs* and the *Book of History*, the compilation of the *Book of Rites* and the *Book of Music, the Book of Changes* and the writing of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (Li 1986; Fang 1999).

Confucianism (*Rujia* or *Rujiao* in Chinese): It is a fundamental philosophical tradition that has shaped Chinese culture for 2,500 years. The core values and basic elements of Confucianism have been studied by scholars from various disciplines. The basic principles of Confucianism are humanity (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*), and faithfulness (*xin*).

The principles of Confucianism are contained in the nine ancient Chinese works handed down by Confucius and his followers, who lived in an age of great philosophic activity. These writings can be divided into two groups: the Five Classics and the Four Books.

The *Wu Ching* (Five Classics), which originated before the time of Confucius, consist of the *I Ching* (Book of Changes), *Shu Ching* (Book of History), *Shih Ching* (Book of Poetry), *Li Chi* (Book of Rites), and *Ch'un Ch'iu* (Spring and Autumn

Annals). The *I Ching* is a manual of divination probably compiled before the 11th century BC; its supplementary philosophical portion, contained in a series of appendixes, may have been written later by Confucius and his disciples. The *Shu Ching* is a collection of ancient historical documents, and the *Shih Ching*, an anthology of ancient poems. The *Li Chi* deals with the principles of conduct, including those for public and private ceremonies; it was destroyed in the 3rd century BC, but presumably much of its material was preserved in a later compilation, the Record of Rites. *The Ch'un Ch'iu*, (Spring and Autumn Annals) the only work reputedly compiled by Confucius himself, is a chronicle of major historical events in feudal China from the 8th century BC to Confucius's death early in the 5th century BC.

The *Shih Shu* (Four Books), compilations of the sayings of Confucius and Mencius and of commentaries by followers on their teachings, are the *Lun Yü* (Analects), a collection of maxims by Confucius that form the basis of his moral and political philosophy; *Ta Hsüeh* (The Great Learning) and *Chung Yung* (The Doctrine of the Mean), containing some of Confucius's philosophical utterances arranged systematically with comments and expositions by his disciples; and the *Mencius* (Book of Mencius), containing the teachings of one of Confucius's great followers (on line, available: <http://www.encarta.msn.com>).

Culture: The collection of values, beliefs, behaviours, customs, and attitudes that distinguish a society (Fan, 2000:3-4).

Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908): She was a powerful figure who was the *de facto* ruler of the Qing Dynasty of China in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Fan Zhongyan (989-1107): He proposed a ten-point program of reform. Abuses through the course of the prosperous 11th century, especially in the countryside, brought rural misery and the depletion of the central treasury. Fan sought to bring better men into government and to concentrate on local government (The Encyclopaedia of World History, 2001. on line, available: <http://www.bartleby.com/67/371.html>).

FL/L2 vocabulary items and FL/L2 words: The terms are used interchangeably in this study in the sense that both the above terms are used to include fixed and idiomatic phrases as well, although Nation (1983) defines “word” as a word family which includes inflectional as well as derivative forms of each word (Nakamura, 2000:6).

Keywords: According to Oxford (1990:41-42), remembering a new word by using auditory and visual links. The first step is to identify a familiar word in one's own language that sounds like the new word---this is the “auditory link.” The second step is to generate an image of some relationship between the new word and a familiar one--this is the “visual link”. Both links must be meaningful to the learners.

Keyword method, Keyword technique and Keyword strategy: Are used interchangeably since they refer to the same definition, although the terms are different. For example Keyword is used as one of the memory *strategies* in Oxford's (1990) study or as *method* under the heading of memory strategies by Nakamura (2000), Schmitt (1997), etc., whereas, it is termed as *technique* in Carter's (1987:153) study and used as method by many other researchers (e.g. O'Malley *et al* 1990; Rodriguz & Sadowki 2000).

L2 learners, EFL learners and FL learners: Are used interchangeably in the sense that all of the terms indicate those who are learning English as a non-native, additional language (Nakamura, 2000:6).

Language learning strategies (LLSs): Cohen (1998:4) defines language learning and language use strategies as those processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning and use of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about the language.

Cohen (1998:5) further explains that language learning strategies include strategies for identifying the material that needs to be learned, distinguishing it from other material if need be, grouping it for easier learning (e.g. grouping vocabulary by category into nouns, verbs, adjectives, and so forth), having repeated contact with the material (e.g. through classroom tasks or the completion of homework assignments), and formally committing the material to memory when it does not seem to be acquired naturally (whether through rote memory techniques such as repetition, the use of mnemonics, or some other memory technique).

Language learning styles: Refer to any individual learner's natural, habitual, and preferred ways of learning (Willing, 1988:1).

Language learning strategies (LLSs) and Language learning techniques: They are used interchangeably. Although Naiman et al (1978) make a distinction between *strategies* that are “general more or less deliberate approaches” and *techniques* termed as “observable forms of language learning behaviour”, it is interesting to find

that the terms *strategies* and *techniques* are used by different researchers in the studies of vocabulary learning. For example, Harvey (1985), when discussing Chinese EFL learners' features, mentioned the use of memorisation and RL as a basic acquisition technique. Gairns and Redman (1986) term RL as a memorisation technique. Thompson (1987) in *Memory in Language Learning*, suggests "learning vocabulary through mnemonic techniques". Dickinson (1987) also uses the term techniques to describe Cohen and Aphek's (1981) mnemonic association methods, whereas others (e.g. Rubin and Thompson 1994; Ellis 1995; Gu and Johnson 1996; Oxford 1990; Schmitt 1997; Ahmed 1998) use *strategies* in describing their studies of vocabulary learning.

Memory strategies (MSs): (traditionally known as mnemonics) Involve relating the word to be retained with some previously learned knowledge, using some form of imagery, or grouping (Schmitt, 1997:211).

Memorisation: Also refers to strategies which focus on the storage and retrieval of language; therefore some of the strategies, such as drill and repetition, used for practice are the same as memorisation strategies. However, in the case of memorisation, attention is paid to the storage and retrieval process. The goal of these strategies is organisation... (Wenden & Rubin, 1987:24).

Mencius (c.371-289 B.C.E): He was the second of the great classical Confucian thinkers of the Zhou Dynasty; memorialized as the Second Sage after Confucius (Berthrong & Berthrong, 2000:196).

Mnemonics: "Mnemonic" means "aiding memory" (Higbee, 1979)...Mnemonics work by utilising some well-known principles of psychology: a retrieval plan is developed during encoding, and mental imagery, both visual and verbal, is used. They help individuals to learn faster and recall better because they aid integration of new material into existing cognitive units and because they provide retrieval cues (Thompson, 1987:43).

Practice: Strategies which contribute to the storage and retrieval of language while focusing on accuracy of usage. Practice involves strategies such as: repetition, rehearsal, experimentation, application of rules, imitation, and attention to detail (Wenden & Rubin, 1987:24).

Repetition: Imitating a language model, including overt practice and silent rehearsal. (Wenden, 1991:21).

Rote learning (RL): According to dictionaries, learning something in order to be able to repeat it from memory rather than learning it in order to understand it.

Rote learning strategies (RLSs): In this study refer to repetition, practice and memorisation involved in eight aspects: to read silently or aloud; to write down the items (more than once); to learn words in list forms or cards; to find typical examples; to find the translation equivalents; to find definitions; to memorise paired items and to memorise irregular verbs.

Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925): In Chinese history, he is known as “the Father of the Revolution” or “the Father of the Republic”. In the West, he is considered the most important figure of Chinese history in the 20th century. (Modern China: Sun Yat-sen. on line, available: <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/MODCHINA/SUN.HTM>).

Vocabulary: A term which refers to a list or set of words for a particular language or a list or set of words that individual speakers of a language might use (Hatch & Brown, 1995).

Vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs): According to Schmitt’s taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies (1997:205), they involve many strategies such as, social strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and determination strategies.

Vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) refer to learning strategies, learners employ with the specific purpose of facilitating the learning process of vocabulary items (Nakamura, 2000:6).

Wang Anshi (1021-1086): He was a politician, poet and prose writer of the Northern Song Dynasty. Wang subscribed to a utilitarian view of literature, the function of which was to improve society.

(on line, available: <http://www.renditions.org/renditions/authors/wangs.html>)

Zhu Xi (1130-1200): He was the greatest of the Southern Song Neo-Confucian philosophers. The second most important Confucian thinker after Confucius himself. His works were the basis of the civil service examinations from 1313 to 1905 (Berthrong & Berthrong, 2000:198).

APPENDIX 6

Part 1 of the interview---rank ordering of the 10 preferred strategies (Str.)

Subjects	Str.1	Str.2	Str.3	Str.4	Str.5	Str.6	Str.7	Str.8	Str.9	Str.10
1	10	4	3	6	7	9	5	8	2	1
2	7	9	3	1	8	6	5	10	4	2
3	5	6	8	9	10	3	1	4	7	2
4	4	9	2	5	1	3	7	6	8	10
5	7	8	4	3	1	9	5	6	10	2
6	5	4	3	8	6	2	9	10	7	1
7	1	5	6	8	2	4	10	7	9	3
8	5	6	2	7	1	3	10	8	9	4
9	1	5	6	8	2	4	7	10	9	3
10	7	6	10	2	8	3	4	5	9	1
11	5	6	2	7	1	3	10	8	9	4
12	7	8	1	9	6	10	4	3	5	2
13	5	3	7	2	9	4	8	6	10	1
14	9	10	8	2	1	7	5	6	4	3
15	8	7	9	1	5	2	3	10	6	4
16	9	10	3	2	4	8	7	5	6	1
17	7	2	6	8	1	9	4	3	10	5
18	9	3	8	1	5	6	7	4	10	2
19	1	9	10	4	2	6	3	5	8	7
20	10	1	9	4	5	8	6	2	7	3
21	2	3	6	5	9	8	1	7	10	4
22	9	4	3	5	1	8	6	7	10	2
23	6	9	1	8	2	4	10	3	7	5
24	4	9	8	5	1	6	10	3	7	2
25	6	9	2	10	4	1	8	5	3	7
26	10	9	5	4	2	6	7	3	8	1
27	9	1	2	7	4	3	8	10	6	5
28	9	6	4	2	1	3	10	5	8	7
29	9	7	5	3	1	6	2	4	10	8
30	5	10	3	9	4	2	8	6	7	1
31	7	10	9	8	1	2	3	5	6	4
32	1	10	6	9	4	2	8	6	7	5
34	6	5	3	2	1	9	10	4	7	8
35	8	1	5	7	4	6	10	9	3	2
36	9	5	4	10	1	3	8	6	7	2
37	6	8	9	5	3	1	4	10	2	7
38	1	8	9	10	3	2	5	6	7	4
39	6	7	3	4	2	1	10	8	9	5
40	1	9	3	8	6	7	10	5	4	2
41	6	7	3	4	1	2	10	8	9	5
42	9	8	7	4	5	6	10	3	2	1
43	6	4	3	2	5	1	7	8	9	10
44	5	1	9	2	6	3	7	10	8	4
45	10	9	3	2	1	5	7	6	8	4
46	10	2	8	4	1	5	9	7	3	6
47	7	9	4	10	1	5	3	6	8	2
48	10	2	1	8	6	3	4	5	7	9
49	7	8	1	5	2	6	10	3	9	4
50	1	5	6	8	2	4	10	7	9	3
51	9	10	1	6	2	3	7	8	5	4
52	6	8	2	10	4	1	7	9	3	5

53	1	9	5	6	2	4	10	3	7	8
54	7	5	4	6	9	1	10	3	2	8
55	9	10	7	6	1	5	4	2	8	3
56	8	10	7	1	2	3	9	4	5	6
57	3	10	4	5	1	8	6	9	7	2
58	8	9	4	7	5	6	10	2	1	3
59	4	7	6	9	8	5	10	1	2	3
60	7	10	3	1	9	2	4	5	8	6
61	7	10	3	2	1	9	4	5	8	6
62	9	7	1	2	10	4	8	5	6	3
63	8	10	5	9	1	2	4	7	6	3
64	1	10	5	8	4	6	7	2	9	3
65	9	6	3	1	10	7	8	4	5	2
66	1	10	2	9	4	3	6	8	7	5
67	8	5	9	1	6	7	4	3	10	2
68	10	9	3	8	1	7	6	4	5	2
69	1	10	6	8	2	4	9	3	7	5
70	5	3	2	8	1	9	10	7	6	4
71	1	10	2	8	7	5	9	3	6	4
72	7	10	3	2	8	1	4	5	9	6
73	5	9	4	8	1	6	10	3	2	7
74	4	10	2	6	1	7	9	3	5	8
75	6	7	2	9	1	3	10	4	5	8
76	4	9	8	6	3	1	2	5	10	7
77	7	9	1	8	2	3	10	4	6	5
78	6	8	1	10	9	7	3	2	5	4
79	1	8	2	3	7	4	10	6	9	5
80	3	4	10	6	2	9	5	7	8	1
81	2	10	7	1	4	6	9	3	8	5
82	10	6	1	7	5	2	9	8	3	4
83	2	7	6	3	1	4	5	8	9	10
84	7	2	8	9	3	5	10	4	6	1
85	9	10	4	3	8	5	6	7	2	1
86	4	8	10	5	1	9	2	6	7	3
87	1	5	10	6	3	2	9	8	4	7
88	10	5	1	8	2	3	9	4	6	7
89	9	4	1	8	3	5	10	6	7	2
90	8	9	4	1	10	5	6	7	3	2
91	8	2	3	4	7	5	10	6	9	1
92	1	6	5	7	4	3	10	8	9	2
93	5	9	7	10	1	6	8	3	4	2
94	6	5	1	7	9	3	8	2	4	10
95	8	4	3	5	1	6	7	9	10	2
96	1	9	5	3	10	4	8	7	6	2
97	9	2	8	1	6	10	3	4	7	5
98	8	4	1	5	3	2	6	9	10	7
99	1	8	4	3	5	10	9	6	7	2
100	1	10	5	2	6	7	9	4	8	3

APPENDIX 7

Factor analysis of 28 questionnaire items (Items 13-40)
The component matrix

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Item 14				-.493		
Item 15	.475	.528				
Item 16	.416					
Item 17		.592	-.476			
Item 19	.459		-.481		.506	
Item 20						.664
Item 21	.422	.486	-.426			
Item 22	.580					
Item 23	.406	.549			.402	
Item 27	.502					
Item 37		.455			.468	
Item 38		.552			-.535	
Item 40		.509				
Item 24				.526		
Item 26		.549	.482			
Item 39	.491					
Item 28	.588					-.444
Item 29	.662					
Item 32	.573		.425			
Item 33				.568		-.421
Item 34			.519	-.486		
Item 31			-.542			
Item 35	.577					
Item 30	.714					
Item 36	.699					
Item 18	.917					
Item 25	.711					

Extraction Method: Principle Component Analysis.

6 components extracted.

Only loadings of +/- .40 or greater are included in this solution.

APPENDIX 8

SCORES

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	25	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
	27	1	1.0	1.0	2.0
	30	1	1.0	1.0	3.0
	31	2	2.0	2.0	5.0
	33	1	1.0	1.0	6.0
	34	1	1.0	1.0	7.0
	35	1	1.0	1.0	8.0
	37	1	1.0	1.0	9.0
	39	2	2.0	2.0	11.0
	41	2	2.0	2.0	13.0
	42	2	2.0	2.0	15.0
	43	3	3.0	3.0	18.0
	44	2	2.0	2.0	20.0
	46	1	1.0	1.0	21.0
	47	4	4.0	4.0	25.0
	48	1	1.0	1.0	26.0
	49	2	2.0	2.0	28.0
	52	3	3.0	3.0	31.0
	53	2	2.0	2.0	33.0
	54	2	2.0	2.0	35.0
	60	7	7.0	7.0	42.0
	62	1	1.0	1.0	43.0
	63	5	5.0	5.0	48.0
	64	2	2.0	2.0	50.0
	65	2	2.0	2.0	52.0
	66	2	2.0	2.0	54.0
	68	5	5.0	5.0	59.0
	69	2	2.0	2.0	61.0
	70	3	3.0	3.0	64.0
	71	5	5.0	5.0	69.0
	72	5	5.0	5.0	74.0
	73	3	3.0	3.0	77.0
	74	2	2.0	2.0	79.0
	76	2	2.0	2.0	81.0
	77	2	2.0	2.0	83.0
	78	1	1.0	1.0	84.0
	79	1	1.0	1.0	85.0
	81	1	1.0	1.0	86.0
	83	2	2.0	2.0	88.0
	84	3	3.0	3.0	91.0
	85	1	1.0	1.0	92.0
	86	1	1.0	1.0	93.0
	87	4	4.0	4.0	97.0
	89	1	1.0	1.0	98.0
	91	1	1.0	1.0	99.0
	94	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

APPENDIX 9

Scores for 5 parts of the test

Subjects	Part 1 (30%)	Part2 (10%)	Part 3 (10%)	Part 4 (30&)	Part 5 (20%)	Total
1	9	9	0	10	11	39
2	5	8	0	9	8	30
3	7	7	1	6	10	31
4	10	9	1	10	5	35
5	6	9	1	7	8	31
6	4	10	0	5	6	25
7	5	10	0	11	11	37
8	11	9	1	10	12	43
9	6	9	0	10	9	34
10	4	9	1	7	6	27
11	15	10	1	13	8	47
12	2	6	1	15	15	39
13	11	9	1	10	12	43
14	15	10	1	13	8	47
15	21	9	0	8	6	44
16	18	4	1	9	10	42
17	9	9	3	11	10	42
18	8	8	1	16	10	43
19	6	9	2	19	11	47
20	9	9	3	17	8	46
21	11	10	3	13	7	44
22	8	7	6	18	8	47
23	11	10	2	13	12	48
24	13	6	3	16	14	52
25	19	10	6	10	8	53
26	25	9	0	17	9	60
27	25	7	2	19	15	68
28	28	9	0	25	6	68
29	21	7	2	10	14	54
30	9	10	2	17	11	49
31	13	9	3	18	10	53
32	9	8	1	18	16	52
33	25	8	7	2	18	60
34	23	8	6	15	8	60
35	26	8	7	13	8	62
36	29	8	3	12	11	63
37	27	9	0	18	14	68
38	24	9	2	24	17	76
39	28	8	4	19	13	72
40	26	10	7	25	16	84
41	27	8	4	22	16	77
42	30	8	3	18	12	71
43	24	10	3	23	13	73
44	26	8	5	20	17	76
45	28	10	2	23	15	78
46	28	8	4	26	19	85
47	30	10	7	22	20	89
48	30	8	10	23	16	87
49	28	8	5	22	16	79
50	24	8	7	20	15	74
51	27	10	3	16	15	71

52	27	8	3	15	7	60
53	23	8	3	20	14	68
54	24	9	9	12	11	65
55	25	8	5	20	14	72
56	26	9	5	18	10	68
57	24	9	3	13	14	63
58	24	9	2	18	11	64
59	27	10	4	14	17	72
60	24	10	4	14	14	66
61	29	9	3	18	11	70
62	1	8	1	26	13	49
63	12	10	0	10	9	41
64	27	9	0	9	9	54
65	10	0	6	3	22	41
66	8	6	1	13	5	33
67	14	8	7	14	9	52
68	23	8	3	10	16	60
69	26	7	3	16	14	66
70	27	8	10	22	16	83
71	19	8	7	23	17	74
72	28	9	8	23	15	83
73	27	7	1	21	17	73
74	25	10	10	15	12	72
75	27	10	1	19	13	70
76	27	5	4	19	14	69
77	27	8	7	20	11	73
78	27	9	5	16	15	72
79	28	7	7	25	17	84
80	26	10	3	21	11	71
81	21	8	2	22	16	69
82	24	9	8	12	7	60
83	16	8	5	12	19	60
84	23	5	3	20	14	65
85	28	8	3	16	15	70
86	26	8	1	21	15	71
87	24	9	2	22	14	71
88	27	8	4	26	12	77
89	28	8	7	22	16	81
90	29	8	2	26	19	84
91	28	7	9	26	17	87
92	30	8	8	26	15	87
93	29	9	10	27	19	94
94	25	10	9	28	19	91
95	28	8	7	25	18	86
96	24	8	9	27	19	87
97	25	8	0	16	14	63
98	24	8	0	20	12	64
99	16	8	4	25	10	63
100	11	10	10	16	16	63
Mean	20.21	8.28	3.7	17.04	12.85	62.06

APPENDIX 10

Test scores (gender 1=female; 2=male)

subjects	gender	scores
1	1	25
2	1	27
3	1	30
4	1	31
5	1	31
6	1	33
7	1	34
8	2	35
9	1	37
10	1	39
11	1	39
12	1	41
13	2	41
14	1	42
15	1	42
16	2	43
17	1	43
18	1	43
19	2	44
20	1	44
21	1	46
22	1	47
23	1	47
24	1	47
25	1	47
26	1	48
27	2	49
28	1	49
29	1	52
30	1	52
31	1	52
32	1	53
33	1	53
34	2	54
35	2	54
36	2	60
37	2	60
38	1	60
39	1	60
40	1	60
41	1	60
42	1	60
43	1	62
44	2	63
45	2	63
46	2	63
47	1	63
48	1	63
49	1	64
50	1	64
51	1	65

52	1	65
53	1	66
54	1	66
55	2	68
56	2	68
57	1	68
58	1	68
59	1	68
60	1	69
61	2	69
62	2	70
63	1	70
64	1	70
65	2	71
66	1	71
67	1	71
68	1	71
69	1	71
70	2	72
71	1	72
72	1	72
73	1	72
74	1	72
75	2	73
76	1	73
77	1	73
78	1	74
79	2	74
80	1	76
81	1	76
82	1	77
83	1	77
84	1	78
85	1	79
86	1	81
87	1	83
88	1	83
89	2	84
90	2	84
91	1	84
92	1	85
93	1	86
94	2	87
95	1	87
96	1	87
97	1	87
98	1	89
99	2	91
100	1	94

APPENDIX 11

Examples of coded transcripts from raw interview data

Note: Self-reported beliefs quoted have been edited for syntax to facilitate comprehension. Terms used by learners to express these beliefs, however, have not been changed.

G.1: Group 1 for full-RL supporters

R1: Reason 1, Chinese educational/cultural background

R2: Reason 2, EFL environment

R3: Reason 3, Traditional habit

R4: Reason 4, National situation/examination demand

R5: Reason 5, Chinese linguistic background/the way of learning mother tongue

R6: Reason 6, Failure to try out “best” ways.

G.2: Group 2 for partial RL-**supporters****Example 1:**

The speaker is a student of Stage 1, the beginning level in the English Department, however, she had had 6 formal years of English learning before entering the university

Q: Which vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) do you think Chinese learners use the most and why?

A: Of course, RL. I do not feel safe in the exams if I do not use RL. **(G.1; R.4)**

Q: Have you ever thought about getting rid of rote learning if it is traditional? Why?

A: No, never. I am proud of Chinese culture. RL does not only help me with gaining knowledge, but also consolidate my memory when reviewing. **(G.1; R.1)**

Q: Which kinds of strategies can help you personally become a better English learner?

A: It is RL. I began to use it in my childhood when learning Chinese rhymes. I rely on it for memorising, understanding, reviewing and practising. **(G.1; R.3 & R 5)**

Q: What do you think of the relationship between rote learning and the other three large categories of memory strategies as mentioned previously?

A: The relationship is very close. I think RL should be used first and then to develop other “advanced memory strategies (MSs). **(G.1)**

Q: Which kinds of strategies do you think are all useful for learners at different levels of English?

A: RL. We can never go without no matter which stages we come to. I have to learn everything useful by heart in order to make assurance double sure for the special purposes, e.g. answering questions in the test. **(G.1; R 4)**

Example 2:

The speaker is a student of Stage 2, the early intermediate level in the English Department.

Q: Which vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) do you think Chinese learners use the most and why?

A: I think we all use RL most, because it is useful and helpful, particularly it is China's valuable tradition. We learnt, we repeat, we memorise, we understand and we practise. **(G.1; R 1)**

Q: Have you ever thought about getting rid of rote learning if it is traditional? Why?

A: I did and tried to give up the method of RL, because RL is so old in the world that it seems to arouse bad comments. However, I changed my mind later on. It is very hard to change because I felt puzzled when answering some questions which required accurate information. **(G.2; R 6)**

Q: Which kinds of strategies can help you personally become a better English learner?

A: I prefer RL to other MSs, though I use all kinds of MSs. **(G.1)**

Q: What do you think of the relationship between rote learning and the other three large categories of memory strategies as mentioned previously?

A: RL offers the way of getting basic knowledge. RL was the only way for me to learn the Chinese characters and that influenced my way of learning English vocabulary. I memorised the strokes first and then analysed the meaning through the radicals. I learn English words through spelling and then collocation.... **(G.1; R. 5)**

Q: Which kinds of strategies do you think are all useful for learners at different levels of English?

A: RL is very important for us in all the stages of learning. But I don't think we should use it all the time. Perhaps, we can use it less with more knowledge in our mind. **(G.1 & G.2)***

* The distinction between Group 1 and Group 2 is not always so clear. One belief may contribute to both full RL support and partial support.

Example 3:

The speaker is a student of Stage 3, the late intermediate level in the English Department.

Q: Which vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) do you think Chinese learners use the most and why?

A: I think RL. It is a pivotal role in learning English vocabulary. Chinese people are famous for this method, not only because it is a tradition which is hard to change, but also because it is the most effective way in our study. What is more, English is a total foreign language in China. I have no real situation to practise spoken English. I have to use RL to memorise what I have learnt. **(G.1 & G.2; R. 2 & R. 3)**

Q: Have you ever thought about getting rid of rote learning if it is traditional? Why?

A: Yes. I did many times, because I feel ashamed if anyone would say that RL is my sole strategy. I intentionally gave up repetition and reviewing. Oh, my God, later on, I found that my clear head gone. **(G.2; R. 6)**

Q: Which kinds of strategies can help you personally become a better English learner?

A: RL. I feel uncomfortable if I can not get the spellings or phrases exactly right through RL. **(G.1)**

Q: What do you think of the relationship between rote learning and the other three large categories of memory strategies as mentioned previously?

A: I have to use RL first and then try to use other MSs when time permits. It is a good idea to use RL for basic knowledge with which to develop other “advanced” strategies. **(G.1)**

Q: Which kinds of strategies do you think are all useful for learners at different levels of English?

A: RL. however, sometimes I am thinking of using less RL and more other “fashionable” MSs. In fact, I prefer a combination of all the MSs. **(G.2)**

Example 4:

The speaker is a student of Stage 4, the advanced level in the English Department.

Q: Which vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) do you think Chinese learners use the most and why?

A: Obviously RL. I should trace back to *Keju* (imperial examination) system. However, Chinese traditional RL does not mean mere *si ji ying bei* (inflexible memorisation). **(G.1; R. 1)**

Q: Have you ever thought about getting rid of rote learning if it is traditional? Why?

A: No. I do not think it is necessary to get rid of RL in China. I benefit a lot from this method. It helps me with accurate knowledge, and increase my confidence and assertiveness when answering questions either orally or in a written form. **(G.1; R. 4)**

Q: Which kinds of strategies can help you personally become a better English learner?

A: RL. I am accustomed to it from my very early life. **(G.1; R. 3)**

Q: What do you think of the relationship between rote learning and the other three large categories of memory strategies as mentioned previously?

A: I don't think there is much of relationship. However, I am not against to use RL for gaining basic knowledge. **(G.2 & G. 1)**

Q: Which kinds of strategies do you think are all useful for learners at different levels of English?

A: RL. I think I use RL consciously or unconsciously. I would like to use other “advanced” MSs as well. I admit that I do more reading work than solely reciting single words or phrases, but in the context. **(G. 2)**