

Guangyu-PG1

by Guangyu Zhu

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PG1 - FULL RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Student Details

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Start Date	1 st September 2024	End Date	1 st September 2026

PhD by Research	PhD Practice Based	PhD by Published Works	Professional Doctorate (including DBA, DProf, Ed D)	MPhil by Research	MPhil Practice Based
☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐
MA by Research	MSc by Research	MRes			
☐	☐	☐			

Proposed Research

Current Proposed Title (20 / 30 words):
Understanding the Interplay between Trait Self-Control, Self-Control Depletion, and English Learning Achievement Among Chinese University EFL Learners
Background & Context (approx. 500 words)
The study of emotions became more important in foreign language learning at the beginning of 2000s (Dewaele et al., 2019). Emotions considered as a crucial part in second language acquisition(Shao et al., 2020)have received widespread attention. The inhibition of negative emotions can help individuals achieve their learning goals (Rowe, Fitness., 2018). Emotional self-control is the ability to manage disturbing emotions and remain effective, even in stressful situations(Gifford, 2002). Self-control refers to an individual's ability to manage stressful emotions or impulsivity to achieve their goals and values (Diamond, 2013), which can be divided into trait self-control and state self-control(Baumeister et al., 2007). Trait self-control refers to an individual's capacity to alter and regulate predominant responses to promote desirable long-term goals(Tangney, Baumeister and Boone, 2004).Trait self-control has a significant relationship with emotions, which is also an important variable affecting individual's foreign language achievement(Nielsen, Gwozdz and Ridder, 2019). Individuals with high trait self-control are good at managing their emotions and behaviors, they can achieve their goals more easily, and may possibly get a good score during test. For those who with low trait self-control tend to succumbing to other attracts or irrelevant thoughts. As a result , their achievements usually fall short of expectations (Ridder, Wit, 2016). Trait self-control could be seen as a significant predictor of motivation and emotions when individuals taking tests(Lindner et al., 2017, 2018). Also, it could predict the performance and scores in achievement test (Duckworth, Seligman., 2005, 2006).
Background reading

From the study of Linck et al. (2014), self-control is also a crucial part in second language acquisition. According to Baumeister et al. (2007), a longer period of self-control can temporarily undermine subsequent self-control. Individual's self-control ability could be depleted after distracting by stressful emotions and presented a relatively low test scores in an arithmetic and an intelligence test (Bertrams et al., 2013). According to Englert et al. (2017), in recent years, self-control depletion has become more and more popular in the research relating to education. The decrease of an individual's self-control ability and willingness after engaging in self-control activities is called self-control depletion (Baumeister et al., 1998). Self-control depletion can impact cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of an individual, including learning behaviors (Freeman, Muraven., 2010).  1

Based on the research of Linck and Weiss (2015), the impact of self-control depletion concentrates on individual's memory and attention during English learning process and according to Palladino, Cornoldi (2004) self-control depletion also has great influence on reasoning; Self-control depletion also presents great influence on English learners' anxiety (Atkins, Baddeley, 1998) and enjoyment (Daneman, Hannon, 2007) as well as fatigue (Engle, 2001); The experiment from Bertrams, Unger and Dickhauser (2011) presented the impact of self-control depletion on the time of English learning and learning strategies, and the effects of self-control depletion on academic performance of English learners has been shown in the experiment of Ciarocco et al. (2007). Shortly, studies on the effect of self-control depletion on English learning mainly focus on cognitive abilities, emotions and the behavior of English learners.

There are still some limitations regarding to the influence of self-control depletion on English learning. First of all, the present studies overlook the influence of trait self-control on self-control depletion, failing to examine performance differences under self-control depletion among English learners with varying levels of self-control; Second they neglect the dynamic changes in self-control depletion, lacking investigation into how English learners experience variations in self-control depletion across different stages or tasks; What's more, they also disregard intervention effects related to self-control depletion, failing to explore how English learners cope with and alleviate the impact of self-control depletion, thereby enhancing self-control abilities and improving English learning outcomes.

According to Lindner et al. (2017), the relationship between trait self-control, self-control depletion, and achievement has not been widely investigated. The present study aims to study the interplay between trait self-control and self-control depletion and the two variables' relation to English achievement of Chinese college EFL learners.  2

Aims and Objectives (approx.. 250 – 500 words)

The present study aims to investigate the effects and interactions of trait self-control and self-control depletion on English learning performance of Chinese college students, and the methods or strategies to improve their self-control ability and English learning achievement. In detail, the aims of the present study are as follows:  3

First, trait self-control and self-control depletion have a complex relationship, and they both affect the performance of college English learners in different ways (Lindner, Retelsdorf, 2019). One study found that trait self-control predicted the motivation to solve cognitive tasks, such as mathematical problem-solving and reasoning, which are related to English learning (Price, Yates, 2010). Another study found that ego depletion led to a progressive performance decrease in a similar cognitive task, and that the negative effect of ego depletion was stronger for students with high trait self-control (Schmeichel et al., 2006). This suggests that high trait self-control may not always protect

against the detrimental effects of self-control depletion, and may even increase the vulnerability to it. In line with these findings, the present study will analyze the influence of trait self-control on self-control depletion and compare the differences in English learning performance of college English learners with different levels of trait self-control in the state of self-control depletion.

Second, self-control depletion can affect English academic performance by impairing the cognitive and motivational processes that are involved in learning a foreign language (Lindner, Retelsdorf, 2019). Self-control depletion can also lower the intrinsic motivation to learn English, and increase the susceptibility to negative emotions (Haug, 2020). English learners with different levels of self-control depletion may differ in their English learning performance depending on the type, difficulty, and duration of the task, as well as their individual characteristics (Lindner, Retelsdorf, 2019). Thus, the present study aims to assess the impact of self-control depletion on college students' English academic performance, that is, whether self-control depletion will reduce the performance and quality of English tests, assignments, reports, etc. Compare the differences in English learning performance of English learners with different levels of self-control depletion, that is, whether the level of self-control depletion will affect an individual's ability and level in English listening, speaking, reading and writing. [Background reading](#)

Third, what has been proved in a study that self-control depletion causes learners' negative affective state and their motivational effort-investment is lower (Inzlicht et al., 2014). There may be an interaction between trait self-control and self-control depletion on English learning performance of college students, but the direction and magnitude of this interaction may vary depending on the context and the measurement of the variables. The present study aims to examine the interaction between trait self-control and self-control depletion on college students' English learning performance, that is, whether the level of trait self-control will affect the negative effect of self-control depletion on English learning performance. Explore the mechanism of the interaction between trait self-control and self-control depletion on English learning performance, that is, how trait self-control and self-control depletion affect individuals' attention, emotions, motivation, cognitive strategies and other factors in English learning tasks.

Finally, the present study aims to explore effective self-control recovery methods or strategies to alleviate self-control depletion of English learners and improve their English learning performance, and the effects of these methods or strategies on English learners with different levels of trait self-control.

Proposed plan of work including timetable

Planned Development	Target Date
Review the literature and identify the research gap and question	June 2024 - September 2024
Develop a research proposal that outlines the purpose, significance, methodology, and expected outcomes of the study	October 2024 - December 2024
Conduct data collection and analysis according to the research design and ethical standards	January 2025 - March 2025
Write the dissertation chapters based on data and findings	April 2025 - April 2026

Revise and edit the dissertation based on the feedback from my supervisor and committee, and check for plagiarism, grammar, and spelling errors	May 2026- September 2026
Submit the final dissertation	September 2026

Proposed methodology (approx. 500 words):

In line with the previous findings , four research questions are proposed as follows:

RQ1:How much does trait self control affect self control depletion? What are the differences in performance of college English learners with different trait self control levels under self-control depletion?

RQ2:How much does self control depletion affect English academic performance? How do English learners with different levels of self control depletion differ in their English learning performance?

RQ3:Is there an interaction between trait self control and self control depletion on English learning performance of college students ? If so, what is the mechanism of action?

RQ4:How to effectively alleviate the self-control loss of English learners and improve their English learning performance? What are some effective self-control recovery methods or strategies? What are the effects of these methods or strategies on English learners with different trait self control levels?

To answer the questions, the present study will conduct a mixed research method including quantitative method and qualitative method. The participants will be 60 college students from a Chinese University and the total sample size needed to fulfil the requirements of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

The researcher will first develop and issue trait self control scale (TSCS) based on self-report scale (Tangney et al., 2004) and then will measure trait self-control using the scale. According to Tangney et al. (2004),trait self-control can be measured through various methods such as self-report scales, behavioral tasks, physiological indicators, etc. The scale will be distributed through Wechat, and according to the results, all participants will be divided into high trait self-control group and low trait self-control group. The two group will be asked to participate in a dual-task paradigm in order to measure their self control depletion level. Baumeister et al.(1998) proposed that the behavioral tasks(dual-task paradigm) are the most widely method to measure self-control depletion. One of the tasks is to watch a disgusting video clip, the other one is to complete a difficult English reading comprehension question. While taking the tasks, the performance of the students will be recorded. Then, the researcher will ask all participants to complete a comprehensive English ability test, then compare their scores to their former CET-4 scores collected from their teachers. That is to assess the performance of college English learners using standardized tests or test scores. At last, a semi-structure interview will be given to all participants to investigate the strategies they adopt to regulate their emotions during the task. The data collected from the experiment will be analyzed through SPSS.

Introductory bibliography:

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Facilities and resources available for the investigation: please indicate if you expect to need any special resources

I will use the resources including relevant books, articles from different journals and other materials from UWTSD library as well as those from CNKI and other database websites, such as J-store, Google scholar, etc. I will also learn and use statistical analysis tools like ANOVA and SPSS from UWTSD IT facilities. These facilities and resources could be accessed in a favorable and legal way. The research object of this study is Chinese university students. Therefore, in the middle of the study, I need to return to China to conduct the experiment and collect relevant data for about half a year. During this period, I personally bear all the expenses related to the research. I will be carrying out fieldwork or interviews in China and promised to followed the correct protocol. Before I conduct the experiment, I will get permission and complete the ethical clearance first. I will make sure that the whole experiment process will go in a standard way. 

Intellectual Property IP

It is anticipated that Intellectual Property (IP) will be produced as a result of this research.

Tick /

	YES	NO
Is the IP already subject to a separate agreement with a third party (e.g. employer, sponsor or external funder)? If so please provide details below	☐	☒
Is the research dependent upon background IP owned by: If so, please provide details below	UWTSD ☒	A third party ☐
Text box will expand		

Tick /

I understand that:	YES	NO
If any party other than the student is likely to be involved in the development of IP a separate IP agreement will be needed and it may be necessary for the student to assign the IP rights to the University.	☒	☐

If there are no third parties involved in the creation of the IP the student is deemed to own the IP, however should the student wish to commercially exploit their IP and require the assistance of the University to do so, they will be required to assign their IP to the University. https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/iiced/protecting-innovation-and-creativity---intellectual-property/	☒	☐
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Student Signature

Signature or Print Name:	Guangyu Zhu	Date: December 12, 2023
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FINAL GRADE

74/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

This is an excellent Thesis Proposal which explores the research topic very effectively.

You provide an interesting rationale for the study and relate to extensive relevant background reading and your awareness of the Thesis Proposal module content.

You have succeeded in identifying a key area for further investigation in relation to current practice. This response indicates a level of critical understanding congruent with this level.

The style is coherent and reflective. You have obviously gained a great deal from this module and you are aware of the limitations of a small scale study. Good awareness of the research methodology, clear research questions and awareness

of shortcomings and this is communicated clearly.

You might like to consider:

1. Making further references to the research methods literature. Refer to Punch (2009) and Thomas (2009) as discussed in class.
2. It might be useful to include more detail in the Gantt chart, outlining what the supervision team will focus on in detail.
3. Refer in further detail to Ethical Guidance: <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/media/uwtsd-website/content-assets/documents/research/REICoP-July-2022.pdf>
4. Explaining how theory relates to TEFL in further detail earlier in the proposal.
5. Use Harvard referencing consistently.

I enjoyed reading your research proposal.
Congratulations and the best of luck with the
remainder of your course.

PAGE 1

QM

Background reading

Evidence of wide reading

PAGE 2



Comment 1

The contribution of this existing literature is not clear.



Comment 2

What is your original contribution?



Comment 3

Has this been done previously?

PAGE 3

QM

Background reading

Evidence of wide reading

PAGE 4



Comment 4

Check you have one research question outlined at a time :)



Comment 5

explain fully please.



Comment 6

Ethics ! caution with inappropriate viewing material??



Comment 7

Use Harvard referencing - all references should be displayed in alphabetical order.



Comment 8

Refer to Ethical Guidelines from UWTSD and BERA (2018)