



## Why We Do and What We Do: The Experience of Good English Language Learners

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This narrative inquiry explores how good English language learners' (GELs) L2 motivation and usage of language learning strategies change over time based on the onset age of active English learning in the Korean English as a foreign language (EFL) context. And also the current study examines how GELs learn English. The authors investigated a total dataset of 83 GELs from 25 autobiographical books on "How I succeed in learning English as a foreign language." Results indicated that as GELs' language proficiency increased, their L2 motivation changed in different patterns depending on the onset age of active English learning. Second, GELs preferred metacognitive, cognitive, memorization, and social strategies both at the beginning and advanced stage of the English learning process regardless of the onset age of active learning. Finally, GELs acquired English through a well-balanced language course regardless of the onset age of active learning. Pedagogical implications and future research suggestions are also discussed.

**Keywords:** age of onset; good English language learners; language learning strategies; learner motivation; narrative inquiry

## Introduction

Since Naiman's seminal work (Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978) was published, numerous studies have focused on what makes good language learners (GLLs). Since the studies have shown that GLLs are distinctive from their counterparts in terms of cognitive and affective aspects (Abraham & Vann, 1987; Genesee, 1987; Griffiths, 2008; Lee, Shin, Hwang, Kim, Lee, & Song, 2015; Mohamadpour, 2013; Oxford, 2013; Sakai & Takagi, 2009; Valadi & Rashidi, 2014), in-depth analysis and documentation of GLL's learning profiles can help both second language (L2) teachers and learners in a pedagogical setting. According to Hwang (2017), for instance, teachers can enjoy benefits of designing their L2 class by referring to GLLs' learning profiles. GLLs' learning profiles also can provide learners with instructions on how to improve their L2 skills.

As such, exploring GLLs' learning features and identifying GLLs' profiles generates useful sources for L2 teaching and learning. However, previous research on the characteristics of GLLs and their relevant variables has been undertaken mainly in the English as a second language (ESL) setting, and it is not until recently that GLLs and their profiles drew attention in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context. Takeuchi (2003) analyzed autobiographical books published in Japan about GLLs' own L2 learning history and illustrated specific types of their language learning strategies (LLSs) (e.g., metacognitive strategies and strategies in a specific skills area). Lee and Heinz (2016) asked Korean student interpreters to freely describe their language experiences in a short essay, and confirmed the importance of monitoring learning processes (e.g., meta-cognitive strategy), reading aloud, text analysis (e.g., cognitive strategy), and learner autonomy. Particularly, these studies deeply explored L2 strategy types GLLs had depended on using a qualitative approach, and espoused the importance of L2 learning strategies.

Built on a series of previous research, the current study examined good EFL learners' learning strategies and, further, motivation by analyzing Korean cases of good English language learners (GELLS). Especially our primary interest was in identifying changes over time among GELLS in the type of motivation and in the use of language learning strategies. Considering that motivation is flexible, L2 proficiency continues to develop and learners' use of language learning strategies are likely to change, investigating the change in GELLS' type of motivation and LLS use over time as their L2 proficiency advances is expected to provide abundant information on the association between L2 learners' motivation, LLS use and L2 proficiency.

To achieve the above-mentioned goal, we took a qualitative approach by analyzing GELLS' autobiographical reports, or self-proclaimed *how-to-books* on how GELLS have become successful in learning English. The use of self-reported books for our research is helpful in terms of research design. First, because the books introduce a wide variety of learning cases over time for groups of different ages, these books were adequate to explore strategy use and motivation types of GELLS according to learners' onset age of English learning. Furthermore, these types of books were considered to have the upper hand over other cross-sectional qualitative methods (i.e., interview, reflection log) reliant on instant recollection on learning experiences. More specifically, the books include information accumulated for a long period of time such as authors' learning context, perception of English learning, effects of L2 use on English learning as well as detailed evidentiary illustrations of how GELLS learned English.

## Literature Review

### Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies (LLSs) are referred to as cognitive activities selected by learners to regulate their own language learning (Griffiths, 2008). The taxonomy of LLSs has been suggested by various LLS scholars. Rubin (1981) distinguished between direct and indirect strategies, and O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, and Russo (1985) identified 15 sub-strategies, and grouped them

into three broader terms: metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies. Meanwhile, Oxford (1990) compiled a list of several LLSs utilized by English learners and introduced metacognitive, cognitive, memory, affective, compensation, and social strategies.

Particularly, the taxonomy of LLSs has been applied to frame a type of learning strategy for specific language skills and develop instruments to measure LLSs. For example, Hwang and Lee (2017) developed a scale for measuring English writing strategies on the basis of Oxford's taxonomy, thereafter, specifying eight writing strategies: meta-cognitive, cognitive, memory, L1 use, L2 use, revision, social and compensatory/search strategies. Jee and Jeon (2012) referred to Oxford's taxonomy and designed the type of English reading strategies such as meta-cognitive, cognitive, compensatory and social strategies. In addition, Oxford (1990) developed a Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) based on her own LLS taxonomy. It is a type of questionnaire that enables English learners to self-report how frequently they use LLSs. SILL has been known to be the most representative measure for LLSs when it comes to its utilization and comprehensive validation (Oxford & Burry-Storck, 1995).

Prior studies using SILL identified LLS as a driving force to make learners more proficient in English (Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Park, 1997), and that the impact on the use of LLSs may be different depending on language skills. For instance, for receptive skills such as reading and listening, more use of cognitive and compensatory strategies was reported, but in the same study learners tended to rely more on cognitive and memory strategies for high speaking achievement (Kim & Suh, 2007). Others demonstrated that learners' learning styles may affect the use of LLSs (Oxford, 2003; Wong & Nunan, 2011) and that motivation may play a primary role in the choice of LLSs (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). Similarly, demographic variables such as learners' gender (Green & Oxford, 1995) and major (Peacock & Ho, 2003) have been suggested to affect the choice and use of LLSs. Study findings propose female students are more likely to employ LLSs than their counterparts, and that college students majoring in English tend to use more types of LLSs than students studying non-English majors.

Meanwhile, as a primary learner variable, LLSs have drawn much attention along with motivation in L2 learning context of Korea. Researchers have put the impact of LLSs on L2 learning at an analytical center and identified that the use of LLSs is conducive to improving learners' L2 proficiency (Kim & Suh, 2007). Furthermore, the use of LLSs was found to be different in light of learners' personality (Lee, 2011; Lee & Lee, 2004), learners' belief (Park, 2005), learners' learning styles (Lee, 2008) and grit (Hwang, 2017), gender (Lee & Lee, 2004) and even regional differences (Kim, & Sim, 2014). Those previous studies show that not only does the use of LLSs play an important role in learning L2, but LLSs are dynamically and intricately interrelated with other L2 learning variables.

## **Language Learning and Motivation**

Theories on motivation have evolved apart from second language acquisition (SLA) theories; however, they have been reviewed by SLA theorists in diverse ways. The notions of integrative and instrumental orientations, concepts raised by a pioneering work of Gardner and Lambert (1972), have been used to explain the relation between motivation type and language achievement. A line of these studies has attempted to explore the relative influence of integrative motivation on language learning compared to its counterpart, instrumental motivation, or vice versa. However, research results have been, to some degree, mixed (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003), and the answer to the question of which motivation is more influential to second language learning has been differentiated depending on the language learning context.

Since the 1990s, research attention has been directed to cognitive theories of learner motivation and has "focused on the patterns of thinking that shape motivated engagement in learning" (Ushioda, 2008). In the cognitive theories, intrinsic motivation plays a vital role in learning, which is distinct from extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsically motivated learners are more likely to become successful language learners than the extrinsically motivated ones (Amabile & Hennessey, 1992). Still, the importance of extrinsic motivation has also been recognized depending on learning contexts, and its

impacts may be apparent or even powerful in the EFL learning settings (Kim, 2004). Meanwhile, Ryan and Deci claimed that intrinsic and extrinsic dichotomy in motivation type fails to reflect multi-level motivational tendencies arising within learners, and they further proposed that the type of learners' motivation be explained on a continuum depending on how learners are self-determined, where amotivation and intrinsic motivation are at the polarities, and in the middle of them are subcategories of extrinsic motivation such as external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The research on the relation between motivation and second language learning, extending its boundaries as of now, has been discussed under socio-constructivism, which claims the association of social context and other situational components with learning motivation. In fact, Dörnyei (1994) incorporated learning situation factors with language-related and learner-internal factors in his framework of motivation. Further, Williams and Burden (1997) presented external factors such as interaction and influences from the broader social context in their study.

Also in the Korean L2 learning context, studies with regard to the role of motivation and its impact on L2 learning have been in parallel with progress of motivation theories. For example, Lee (1996) reported that English learners of Korea have a stronger tendency towards an instrumental approach to L2 learning. On the basis of self-determination theory, Wi and Joh (2010) identified that the force of driving Korean L2 learners to start learning L2 is more likely to arise intrinsically. Kang (2010), focusing on process model of L2 motivation, explored the correlations between Korean collegians' pre-actional-, actional-, and post-actional type of motivation, and reported that intrinsically motivated learners in the pre-actional phase are more willing to communicate and concentrate on the class after they enter into the actional phase, which, in turn, led to higher L2 achievement through self-evaluation. More recently, the scope of exploration on L2 motivation and its impact on L2 learning has been constantly extended into the relationship between L2 motivation and other learning variables such as LLSs (Ahn, 2010), psychological needs (Jee, 2017), L2 proficiency (Hwang, 2017; Lee, Kim, & Bae, 2016), learners' belief (Lee & Kim, 2014), learning environment (Kim, 2014), and residential area (Hong & Kim, 2013).

However, most previous studies on the use of LLSs and L2 motivation have relied mainly on a cross-sectional and quantitative approach using a self-report questionnaire. Accordingly, they suffered limitations of failing to capture learners' motivational and strategic shift over time and, what is more, inner voices of why and how L2 learners are motivated and turn more to a certain type of LLSs. In an effort to fill these gaps, this study aimed to explore the change in GELLs' motivation and their use of LLSs from the onset age of active English learning to the time when they perceived themselves as GELLs, using a qualitative approach. More specifically, three specific research questions spearheaded the study:

RQ1: How does Korean GELLs' type of L2 motivation change as their L2 proficiency advances?

RQ2: How does Korean GELLs' use of LLSs change as their L2 proficiency advances?

RQ3: How do Korean GELLs learn English?

## **Methodology**

This study aims to find out how the GELLs' usage of LLSs and motivation changes over time by the onset age of active English learning in the Korean EFL context. To meet this goal, the authors conducted narrative inquiry which is important to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those who experience successful learning in the Korean EFL context. The authors collected 25 autobiographical books which contain stories about GELLs' English learning experiences. These autobiographical accounts of GELLs' learning were then analyzed by the authors.

## Participants

The written narrative data of 83 GELLs from the 25 books were analyzed in this study<sup>1</sup>. All the books were both written and published in Korean. The selection of the books was done on the basis of the six criteria, established by the authors of this study, listed below. The first four criteria involve the GELL's personal history: (1) English proficiency (confirmed to be excellent by results of the test, qualifications, and/or by experienced English language teachers or English language experts); (2) family background (i.e., absence of bilingual elements); (3) academic background (absence of particular language training worthy to be mentioned at school); (4) overseas experiences (absence of such experience). The other two criteria apprehend the contents in the books: (5) personal experience must be the primary base of the content, not on their values or philosophy and (6) contents should be concrete with containing examples.

The onset age of active English learning was confirmed to be in two stages: (1) early starters (who started learning English under the age of 12), which is considered to be "after or near the end of the critical period" (Scovel, 1988, p. 101) and (2) late starters (who started learning English over the age of 12). Table 1 provides information about the 83 GELLs. All the GELLs were native Korean speakers. Among them, 31 were early starters, and 53 of them were late starters.

TABLE 1  
*Information of GELLs*

Onset Age of Active Learning	Participant	Sex	English Proficiency	Learning Resources
Early starters	01	M	TOEIC 950	Animation
	03	M	Professional translator	Movies
	11	M	CEO of English academy	Motives
	12	M	CEO of English academy	Children's literature, animation
	13	F	TOEFL CBT 263	Children's literature
	27	M	Bilingual	Children's literature
	29	M	Undergraduate student	English text book
	30	F	Grand SLP awards	Children's literature
	32	F	Bilingual	Children's literature
	41	M	Not reported	Children's literature
	60	M	English lecturer	American pop
	61	M	TOEFL CBT 293	Movies
	64	M	Bilingual	Children's literature
	66	M	Not reported	Children's literature, animation
	67	F	Not reported	Children's literature, animation
	68	M	TOEFL iBT 116	Children's literature, animation
	69	F	Not reported	Children's literature, animation
	70	F	Not reported	Children's literature, animation
	71	F	Not reported	Children's literature, animation
	72	F	Not reported	Children's literature, animation
	73	M	Not reported	Children's literature, animation
74	F	Not reported	Children's literature, animation	
75	F	Not reported	Children's literature, animation	
76	M	Not reported	Children's literature, animation	
77	M	Not reported	Children's literature, animation	

<sup>1</sup> The data from 25 books were collected to analyze with the approval of each publisher. The list of 25 books from 23 publishers were *A boy living in a mountain became the master of English* (2008), *A god of English* (2009), *English success: international vs domestic* (2008), *Harvard project of Korea native mother* (2004), *How Owl dad teaches English with mom and dad's knowledge* (2014), *How to study English* (2009), *Interpret the world* (2014), *Kim's English learning in Korea* (2007), *Master your English before 15* (2012), *Miracle English child care* (2014), *Mr. Hong became an English genius* (2009), *My English started at the movie theater* (2008), *My English study resume* (2008), *Now you can learn English* (2010), *Plunge into English* (2013), *Reputable English learning method of children of Jamsu's* (2013), *Reseat your life* (2016), *Real English success stories* (2012), *Seventeen successful people in English I* (2013), *Seventeen successful people in English II* (2013), *Shihwas' acorn English* (2009), *Successful English conversation without private tutoring* (2006), *Super mom English* (2010), *To those who are lost in English* (2015), and *Youngchul's bold English* (2007).

	78	M	Not reported	Children's literature, animation
	79	M	TOEFL iBT 115	Children's literature, animation
	80	F	Not reported	Children's literature, animation
	81	F	Not reported	Children's literature, animation
	82	M	Not reported	Children's literature, animation
	83	M	Not reported	Children's literature, animation
Late starters	02	M	English lecturer	Movies, drama, news, etc.
	04	M	CEO of English academy	Movies
	05	M	TOEFL PBT 610	AFN radio broadcast
	06	M	Simultaneous interpreter	AFN radio broadcast
	07	M	Honor student of Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Social club
	08	F	International bobsleigh referee	TOEIC book
	09	F	CEO of cosmetic company	English text book
	10	M	CEO of music festival brand	Online course
	14	F	CEO of English academy	Children's literature, cartoon
	15	M	Executive at global company	Movies, drama, news, etc.
	16	M	TOEIC 990	Movies, drama
	17	M	Prize winner at National Speech Contest	Movies
	18	M	CEO of English academy	Literature
	19	M	Simultaneous interpreter	AFN radio broadcast
	20	M	Not reported	Movie script, American pop
	21	F	Not reported	Movies
	22	M	Prize winner at National Speech Contest	Children's literature
	23	M	Professional translator	Children's literature
	24	M	Not reported	Audio CD
	25	F	Graduate student at UPenn.	Movies
	26	F	Prize winner at National Speech Contest	Children's literature
	28	M	Broadcaster	Online course
	31	F	Simultaneous interpreter	Movies, American pop
	33	M	English lecturer	English text book
	34	F	Director of overseas business division	AFN radio broadcast
	35	M	TOEIC 990	Social club
	36	M	CEO of English academy	English dictionary
	37	M	CEO of English academy	Audio tape
	38	M	English Professor	Grammar book
	39	M	Chef	English dictionary
	40	M	Simultaneous interpreter	Movies, drama
	42	F	TOEFL CBT 273	Movies, American pop
	43	F	TOEIC 830	Children's literature
	44	F	Bilingual	Conversation book
	45	M	Producer at a broadcasting station	Audio tape
	46	M	U.N. Peacekeeping Forces	American pop, radio broadcast
	47	F	TOEIC 960	Movies, drama, news, etc.
	48	F	TOEFL IBT 100	Audio CD, drama
	49	F	English teacher	Reading material
	50	F	English teacher	English skill book
	51	F	Professional translator	American broadcast
	52	F	TOEIC 900	English academy
	53	M	Not reported	Documentary film, news
	54	F	International cooperation team member	News
	55	F	Embassy of Canada in Korea	English skill book
	56	F	Not reported	Literature, drama
	57	F	CEO of English academy	Children's literature
	58	M	TOEFL CBT 297	American pop
	59	M	TOEIC 990	American pop
	62	F	Simultaneous interpreter	The Economist
	63	M	TOEIC 990	The Times, news, classics books
	65	F	CEO of English academy	Children's literature

*Note.* English proficiency includes awards or professions. Learning resources are materials that are used for learning English.

## Data Analyses

Paradigmatic analysis was conducted to analyze the data (Polkinghorne, 1995). Paradigmatic analysis involves particular instances of phenomena that are related to more general concepts, and is mainly a matter of categorization and classification (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014). Each of the authors investigated three to five autobiographical books about GELLs. The authors repeated the reading of the written narrative data with an open mind and extracted the data that contained English language learning experience. Next, the authors categorized the data under thematic headings that have been recognized as important to motivation and learning strategies in the literature. Then the onset age of active learning was identified for each of the participants. Finally, the authors reconstructed the data under the stages (i.e., beginning stage, intermediate stage, and advanced stage) of active English learning.

When verifying the contributory role of motivation in English learning, the authors collected the data that contained the dynamics of motivation. As Ushioda (2001) suggested that motivational dimensions include one's academic interest, L2 learning enjoyment, past L2 learning experience, personal satisfaction, desired levels of L2 competence, personal goals, feelings about L2-speaking countries/people, and external/course-related pressure and incentives, the authors regarded any mention about the above as motivation data. For learning strategy analysis, the data containing learning strategies and/or the information on the stages of their use were collected. These data were then categorized under 13 themes and 42 subthemes as shown in Table 2 based on the "LLSs" developed by Oxford (1990) and on the "strategies in a specific skill area" suggested by Takeuchi (2003). These themes were predetermined by the first author of the study.

TABLE 2  
*Language Learning Strategy Classification*

	Themes	Subthemes
Learning strategies	Memory strategies	Creating mental linkages
		Applying images and sounds
		Employing action
		Reviewing well
	Cognitive strategies	Practicing
		Receiving and sending messages
		Analyzing and reasoning
		Creating structure for input and output
	Compensation strategies	Guessing intelligently
		Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing
Metacognitive strategies	Centering your learning	
	Arranging and planning your learning	
	Evaluating your learning	
Affective strategies	Lowering your anxiety	
	Encouraging yourself	
Social strategies	Taking your emotional temperature	
	Asking questions	
	Cooperating with others	
Strategies in a specific skill area	Listening	Empathizing with others
		Deep listening
		Broad listening
	Reading	Narrow listening
		Reading aloud
		Reading analytically
		Reading a lot

Speaking	Reading in a specific field Memorizing sentences Pattern-practicing Emphasizing fluency over accuracy
Vocabulary	Emphasizing accuracy over fluency Increasing basic vocabulary Always checking pronunciation of new words Vocalizing and writing many times
Pronunciation	Guessing and confirming meanings Paying special attention to sound, prosody Imitating and correcting Shadowing
Writing	Watch carefully native speakers' lips and tongue Reading a lot Borrowing expressions from good samples
Grammar	Writing regularly, having their writing corrected Learning consciously, attention to forms

To examine the reliability of categorization of the written narrative data, all samples were cross-checked by other authors and finally checked and confirmed by the first and the third author. To improve the accuracy of content of inter-coder agreement on each of the categorizations, a random sample of the descriptions was assigned to check the coding. With an overall inter-coder agreement of 94.16%, no significant discrepancy was found.

## Results

### Dynamics of L2 Motivation

As GELLs' language proficiency increased, their L2 motivation changed in different patterns depending on the onset age of active English learning (see Table 3).

TABLE 3  
*Most effective L2 motivation in each stage*

Onset Age of Active Learning	Stage	Most Effective
Early starters	BEG	Desired level of L2 competence, external pressures and incentives
	INT	
	ADV	
Late starters	BEG	Personal goals
	INT	Personal satisfaction
	ADV	L2 learning enjoyment

*Note.* BEG means beginning stage, INT means intermediate stage, and ADV means advanced stage.

It seems that the early starters' most effective motivation at the beginning stage of English learning comes from outside the person, such as desired level of L2 competence of parents, day-care providers, or teachers, and external pressure or incentive. Some examples are as follows:

(P03) "Dad emphasized the importance of vocabulary in English learning. I had to read storybooks every day, and was required to write down the new words several times until I could memorize them."

(P27) "Mom told me that she read storybooks or sang nursery rhymes to me at least two hours a day since I was born."



(P67) “I read over and over to compete in a book contest to win an award.”

Parents, day-care providers, or teachers were in positions where they could dispense advice and make demands for the early starters. They had the job of facilitating motivation and responsibility to make the early starters involved in learning English.

As the early starters had cumulative exposure to oral and written language, they were gradually able to control their learning and over time internal motivation regarding concepts such as L2 learning enjoyment that played a vital role. For instance, P01 wrote, “English is the companion of my life and the one that I love. Now I’m in the middle of the world where I’m in the pool of English which I was dreaming of!” P68 also wrote, “I never stop reading books except when I am sleeping. Getting to know English and its culture is so much fun!” As Deci and Flaste (1995) stressed that intrinsic motivation perfectly describes the learning behavior of young children, the process of learning for its own sake was an essential and constructive way to motivate the early starters.

Thus, external regulation, which represents “the least autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 61) and intrinsic motivation were both important in driving the early starters’ English learning behavior. External regulation acted as the reinforcement of the learning behavior at the beginning stage, whereas intrinsic motivation acted as the facilitator of the learning engagement at the advanced stage.

The late starters reported that they devoted all their energy to achieve personal goals, such as to become a professor of English at a university, to become an international referee, to communicate with English-speaking people, or to join a company at the beginning stage of English learning. They consciously valued the learning of English for their lives. They liked adversity and working hard to fill a gap with the help from community members and tended to choose learning strategies to facilitate their own learning. Further, self-directed learning was found among the late starters. Whether or not there was the help of others, they “took the initiative in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, searching for resources for learning, selecting and trying out appropriate learning strategies, and assessing learning outcomes” (Knowles, 1975, p. 18).

As the late starters in our study reached their personal goals, they seemed to acquire the concept of competence in which personal satisfaction and L2 language enjoyment continued to motivate the late starters to be fully engaged in learning. Feeling competent at learning led the late starters to be involved in various activities that expanded their English language proficiency which is an important aspect of a learners’ intrinsic satisfaction (Skinner, 1995). Some examples are as follows:

(P16) “I’m proud of what I’ve accomplished and I think I can do more. I think I really enjoy learning English.”

(P28) “I could believe that my effort will lead to something I desire. How cool it is!”

(P31) “Of course, it goes like this! Studying English is so much fun! ... I think I have a natural curiosity about English.”

As stated, integrated regulation which is “the most autonomous representation of extrinsic motivation” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 62) and intrinsic motivation were both important aspects of driving the late starters’ English learning behavior. Integrated regulation served as a strong impetus to successful English learning at the beginning stage. As the late starters’ English proficiency improved, however, their learning was clearly intrinsically motivated.

## **The Patterns of Language Strategy Use**

GELLs preferred metacognitive strategies, social strategies, and cognitive strategies at the beginning stage and continued to use them even at the advanced stage of their learning. Such preference was not influenced by the onset age of active English learning. GELLs seemed to pay special attention to use

metacognitive strategies (Stewner-Manzanares, Chamot, O'Malley, Kupper, & Russo, 1983) which help the learner “step back and consider his or her own cognitive processes as objects of thoughts or reflection” (Fonagy, 1991, p. 135) such as managing the learning process, practicing regularly, and maximizing opportunities to use the language. GELLs were motivated to find and increase opportunities to use English. This strategy has been stated to be particularly crucial in the EFL context where English is rarely used outside the classroom, which limits the extent of language learning. This finding is consistent with the findings of both Takeuchi (2003), and Lee and Heinz (2016) which stated that successful language learners actively traced sources of language input and increased exposure to input.

Frequent use of social strategies was a surprising finding, which is contrary to the practices of instructional culture of Korea, where rote learning is a learning trait encouraged by the system. GELLs consciously used social strategies with their parents, day-care providers, and teachers or with the members of society in order to develop basic interpersonal communication skills such as asking questions, requesting assistance, and collaborating with others via language, or social speech.

GELLs tend to have very little use of affective strategies and compensation strategies, which would be helpful in developing interpersonal communication skills in order to interact with speakers of a target language (Cummins, 2000). According to Oxford (1996), in Korea, which has the culture that encourages concrete-sequential learning styles, rote memorization strategies are often used. Likewise, GELLs made great use of memory strategies such as remembering through mental imagery or acronyms, repetition, and spaced practice that serve special function of embedding new information into their long-term memory; however, as a prerequisite, they need to be tied with meanings (Lee & Heinz, 2016). Table 4 summarizes GELLs' most preferred language strategy use in each stage of learning.

TABLE 4  
*GELLs' Most Preferred Language Strategies in Each Active Learning Stage*

Onset Age of Active Learning	Active Learning Stage	Most Preferred
Early starters & late starters		<i>Metacognitive strategies</i>
	BEG	Arranging and planning your learning
	INT	Arranging and planning your learning
	ADV	Arranging and planning your learning
		<i>Affective strategies</i>
	BEG	Encouraging yourself
	INT	Encouraging yourself
	ADV	Encouraging yourself
		<i>Social strategies</i>
	BEG	Cooperating with others
	INT	Asking questions
	ADV	Empathizing with others
		<i>Memory strategies</i>
	BEG	Employing action
	INT	Reviewing well
ADV	Reviewing well	
	<i>Cognitive strategies</i>	
BEG	Analyzing and reasoning, practicing	
INT	Analyzing and reasoning	
ADV	Analyzing and reasoning, practicing	
	<i>Compensation</i>	
BEG	Guessing intelligently	
INT	Guessing intelligently	
ADV	Guessing intelligently	
Early starters	BEG-ADV	Metacognitive strategies
	BEG-ADV	Social strategies
	BEG-ADV	Cognitive strategies
Late starters	BEG-ADV	Metacognitive strategies
	BEG-ADV	Social strategies
	BEG-ADV	Cognitive strategies, memory strategies

*Note.* BEG means beginning stage, INT means intermediate stage, and ADV means advanced stage.

## Strategies on a Specific Skill Area

Regardless of the onset age of active learning, GELLS seemed to have an appropriate balance of opportunities to learn from a well-balanced language course as Nation (2001) proposed. In the beginning of the development, GELLS have the opportunity to learn English through listening and reading where the main focus is to understand general ideas and meaning that they are listening to and reading. Then they had an appropriate amount of well-focused deliberate learning, which involved language learning benefits (Ellis, 1990; Long, 1988). Next, GELLS moved on to build their knowledge of the language through speaking and writing activities where they divert their primary attention to the information that they want to convey. Finally, GELLS increased opportunities to practice and use the learned language to develop fluency in English. Table 5 shows GELLS' most preferred strategies for specific language skills in each stage of learning.

TABLE 5  
*GELLS' Most Preferred Strategies for Specific Skills in Each Active Learning Stage*

Specific Area	Active Learning Stage	Most Preferred
Listening	BEG	Broad listening
	INT	Deep listening
	ADV	Broad listening
Reading	BEG	Reading aloud
	INT	Reading a large amount
	ADV	Reading in a specific field
Speaking	BEG	Shadowing
	INT	Memorizing sentences
	ADV	Emphasizing fluency over accuracy
Writing	BEG	Reading a large amount
	INT	Writing regularly, borrowing expressions from good samples
	ADV	Writing regularly, having their writing corrected
Vocabulary	BEG	Vocalizing and writing many times
	INT	Increasing basic vocabulary
	ADV	Incidental learning
Pronunciation	BEG	Paying special attention to sound, prosody, imitating
	INT	Shadowing
	ADV	Shadowing
Grammar	BEG	Learning consciously, attention to forms

*Note.* BEG means beginning stage, INT means intermediate stage, and ADV means advanced stage.

As shown in Table 5, GELLS preferred broad listening and reading aloud at the beginning stage, in which the main focus is to develop oral language. Most parents, day-care providers, and teachers of the early starters believed that reading aloud is one of the most important activities they can do for their child or that their children should do be more familiarized with the target language and stimulate vocabulary growth. The late starters believed that their language development is likely to be boosted by reading aloud as well.

The analysis also suggests the importance of reading a large amount in developing writing skills. Most of the GELLS reported that they read stories and literature, as well as more complex text that provided facts and background knowledge. They tended to borrow expressions from the materials they had read and wrote daily journals. Applebee (1978) argued that reading a large amount is the most fundamental and effective way to develop an early foundation in writing. This finding is also supported by Takeuchi

(2003) where he claims that it is essential to read a large amount to write well.

Focusing on vocalizing and writing new words many times and shadowing the recordings also helped them to gain fluency with spoken and written forms of words and to fight against fossilization regarding the wrong forms of words (Richard, 1985). According to P07, it was easier for him to learn vocabulary when he pronounced the sounds in each word as well as the stress of the appropriate syllables, and when he reversely spelled the sounds into the written form. This is consistent with the previous finding which suggests that the more pronounceable the foreign words are, the easier they are to learn (Ellis & Beaton, 1993).

After becoming familiar with the language, GELs began reading a large amount at their own level with the focus on the meaning of the text, which is beneficial for the quality of language use and language knowledge. They engaged in increasing vocabulary level from basic to higher levels and used the strategy of memorizing sentences by reading aloud and pattern practicing, which seemed to be effective for internalizing the language they were learning. P45 reported that memorizing sentences were helpful to retrieve and use English easily. Then, through reading a large amount in a specific field, GELs seemed to increase their motivation for reading. They also paid special attention to reach a high degree of fluency, which allowed them to speak in a quick and skillful way sounding like native English speakers. At the advanced stage, GELs wrote in English regularly to share thoughts and ideas with others, to engage with the text to deepen their understanding of the content, and to draw connection to prior learning experiences. They stressed the importance of getting feedback from more knowledgeable individuals rather than just writing in English regularly without getting feedback.

## Discussion

The findings in the present study produced several insights on the motivations, learning strategies, and skills of GELs in the Korean EFL context. First of all, GELs' motivation changed along with their learning process by the onset of active English learning. As for the early starters, external regulation, which their parents, day-care providers, or teachers induced in the initial learning stage, had a decisive effect on their learning of a foreign language. As their language proficiency increased, however, intrinsic motivation, such as enjoyment or sense of accomplishment, played a significant role in their language development. As for the late starters, integrated regulation served as a strong impetus to their language learning at an early stage. As they experienced the attainment of their goals through their increased proficiency, however, their learning became intrinsically motivated: gaining enjoyment, confidence and satisfaction from personal success, and positive rewards, all of which were the facilitators of their language learning. As Ushioda (1994) noted, it turned out that learners who experience success and enjoyment or positive rewards attribute their motivation in part to the experience of its continued renewal.

Another important finding is that Korean GELs paid special attention to use metacognitive, cognitive, memorization, and social strategies both at the beginning and advanced stages of the language learning process, regardless of the onset age of active learning. GELs preferred to use metacognitive strategies in their daily lives to reinforce what they learned, which is uniquely preferred in the EFL context. This finding is consistent with previous findings (Lee & Heinz, 2016; Takeuchi, 2003). GELs also frequently used cognitive strategies, such as analyzing, reasoning, practicing, and summarizing, which have a closer relationship with the studying of specific language skills (Nguyen, 2008). The results also showed GELs' widespread use of memorization strategies, which have been known as methods that learners can use to facilitate their learning and memory and as the most practical strategies for L2 vocabulary learning. Such use of memorization strategies is taken for granted in cultures that encourage concrete-sequential learning styles, for instance, like Korea (Oxford, 1996). The ability to read and comprehend English is still more important than the ability to speak in English in the competitive university entrance examination in Korea. In order to obtain a good reading ability it is necessary to improve vocabulary by using memorization strategies. However, GELs in our study made little use of affective and

compensation strategies. It was surprising to find that Korean GELLs made frequent use of social strategies including cooperation with others, requesting assistance, and asking questions. These findings seem to contrast with previous proposals that successful learners of a foreign language may prefer strategies which allow them to study alone rather than to use social strategies that require collaboration with others in a culture, like Korea, where the educational system has been organized around competitive tasks (Chamot, 2004). This might be because the majority of GELLs from the books in this study were not only successful language learners who acquired good scores in English-language tests, such as TOEFL, iBT or TOEIC, but also ones who had enough communicative competence in the language to use outside the classroom. In the Korean EFL setting, in which it is not easy to develop practical English communication abilities in school putting emphasis on reading skills, those who achieve high English-language test scores usually study alone, whereas our research shows clear benefits of employing social strategies for academic and communicative purposes. Finally, GELLs acquired English through a well-balanced language course; meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency development (Nation, 2001), which are important both in the EFL and ESL context. At the early learning stage, GELLs focused on the language input prevailing in listening and reading. To be more specific, the early starters were considerably exposed to authentic oral and written language from picture books, storybooks, nursery rhymes, and children's movies. This became a rich literacy environment provided by their parents or day-care providers. On the other hand, the late starters had large exposure to oral and written language from English textbooks or English practice books, which were appropriate for their level of reading. Over the course of learning, GELLs gradually moved on to develop their linguistic competence through speaking and writing by increasing opportunities to practice and use English. This learning course for GELLs is consistent with proposals that the four language skills should be integrated as they happen in actual language use in order to develop learners' communicative competence (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006).

## Conclusion and Implications

The present study explored the characteristics of GELLs in the Korean EFL context. Paradigmatic analysis of data obtained from 83 GELLs produced several key findings on the motivations, learning strategies, and learning skills of Korean GELLs. They had various strong learning motivations, which changed through the learning process, and their motivation changed by the onset age of active English learning. Regardless of the onset age of active learning, they preferred using a variety of learning strategies, such as metacognitive, cognitive, memorization, and social strategies. They were also well-balanced language learners from the viewpoint of using all four language skills in many of their day-to-day interactions, ranging from language input (listening and reading) to language output (speaking and writing).

The findings have significant pedagogical implications for teachers. To motivate students, English teachers should use class time to provide language learners with enjoyable and successful experiences in the use of English language. If their students are young enough to be sensitive to external stimulus as the GELLs in the study, teachers should keep in mind the role of more knowledgeable individuals to assist with the learners' motivational development. They can initially act as an externally regulated facilitator. For example teachers can encourage students to practice and try out the strategies they have learned from the class outside the classroom. As our study identified which strategies were favored by GELLs for each language skill (listening, reading, speaking, writing, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar) at each learning stage, teachers can apply different strategies for different language skills for students in different levels of English. Finally, it goes without saying that teachers need to organize their classes so that they are well-balanced in terms of meaning and language focus and in terms of the input and output amount that will maximize the development of the four language skills according to students' stages of English development.

To sum up, the current research is a qualitative approach to investigating the characteristics of GELs in the Korean EFL context. We hope the findings of this study provide a guide for teachers and learners of English on how to become GELs in the EFL context. Future research could enrich their characteristics by broadening the data about GELs from more diverse sources, and should explore additional factors which strongly influence GELs' language learning process.

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