LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY (LLS) FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN POLYTECHNIC

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ABSTRACT

The positive relation between Language Learning Strategy (LLS) for English Language learners and success in ESL learning is evident in many studies. The aim of this study is find out the preferred language learning strategies used by the successful learners in polytechnic to learn English and to identify if there are any differences in choosing the language learning strategies between male and female polytechnic students. A slightly modified version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning instrument is use to identify the types and frequency of use of language learning strategies. The results shows that these students are low to medium-level users of strategies. The results also indicated a high preference for cognitive and metacognitive strategies whereas the affective and compensation strategies are the least preferred strategy used by the polytechnic students. Other than that, this study showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the use of the six categories except the memory strategies, as females reported using those strategies significantly more often than males. This finding may indicate that the females in this study may have the ability to memorize things easier than the males, which may also reflect females' ability side in real life.

Keywords: Language learning strategy, LLS, cognitive strategy, metacognitive strategy, SILL

INTRODUCTION

Strategy is an important element in instructional design and implementation of any teaching and learning to gain meaningful learning for personalized learning (Din, 2015; Din, 2020). There has been an extensive body of research into language learning strategies, both in second/foreign language (SL/FL) studies and educational psychology. The literature on learning strategies in SL/FL acquisition emerged from a concern for highlighting the characteristics of effective learners and promoting learner-centred models of language teaching. The focus was on the processes used by learners for managing their SL/FL learning and, more specifically, on identifying those strategies that make learners successful and those that lead to less successful learning. English is considered as the "world language" and is used as an official language for all international conferences. Polytechnic students in most non-English speaking countries are required to take English language courses to meet the need of internationalization and communications with people outside of the country.

In Malaysia, for example, most students start to learn English in elementary schools, and polytechnic students are required to take three hours of English courses each week during the first, third and fifth semester and they have to pass a national-level standardized test (Malaysian University English Test) in order to receive their diplomas in most polytechnic. English is also a major subject test for the admission to university in Malaysia. If the students want to further their studies in degree or higher level, they need to have MUET as this test is one of the requirements for university admission. Although more and more study programs are beginning to design courses in English as a lingua franca, English is not the official academic language at polytechnic level.

Oxford (1989) suggests that a more important concern in the choice of language learning strategies may be the purpose for which a language is learned. Language learning strategies are the crucial element that will aid students to identify the effective way to learn a second language. It is essential for students to know the process and the product in acquiring a second language. On the other hand, language learning strategies will face many challenges as the learners come from different culture and demographic. There are many studies done on

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language learning strategies by many researchers on this interesting and fundamental tool in acquiring second language. However, very little studies have been done on minority especially thirty successful English learners.

Polytechnic is one of the higher learning institution believed to be able to produce the nation's human capital in industrial sectors and others. In present transformative phase, its role has been expended and its establishment has been re-branded in making sure the nation missions are accomplished by providing the human capital source to the industrial sectors. Employability skills of fresh graduates have constantly received considerable attention in the local media. Lack of English language proficiency has often been cited as one of the major factors contributing to graduate unemployment (Sharif, 2005). It is also conceivable that efforts to develop graduates' communication and oral presentation skills during their undergraduate studies have positive effects on their later work performance (Mason et. al. 2006). Given the highlighted studies and reports on unemployability issue among technical graduates, poor command of English has been identified as the main issue that triggers the researchers to keep on investigating various aspects of English teaching within higher education scope.

One of biggest challenges faced by lecturers in Malaysian polytechnics is getting our students to use English inside and outside the classroom. Students who have difficulty in using English tend to come from social and family backgrounds where English is not required for communication. While some of them may attempt to use English in the classroom, they are limited by the contact hours per week where there are only three contact hours per week for the English language class. Therefore, to understand what causes these students to have such difficulties, more research and studies are called for on this area to identify the challenges that they actually experience. Then the outcomes can be link to the poor English command issue so the chain of the overall picture in ELT can be establish. Students must be exposed and taught the strategies that best work for them in order to be a successful learner of a language. Even though, the educators need to stick to the top down system as they cannot escape from the higher order instructions, however, they can still intertwine an effective strategy, as to create a holistic and significant individual for the future.

The objective of this study is to find out the features of thirty successful English Language Learners in a polytechnic by analysing their strategies that they used to learn English language. The six strategies are memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social. The study also aim to identify if male polytechnic students differ in their choice of language learning strategies from the female polytechnic students.

The successful learners in this study are the students who have passed their level one of English examination (Communicative English 1) with good grades. The students are currently in their third semester and were chosen out of about 150 total numbers of students from the same department. The thirty successful students attained Grade A for English in their first semester. These learners are labelled as active students where they frequently engage themselves in the class activities such as public speaking, group discussions, presentations and peer review. Although they came from diverse background in terms of mastery of the language, however, their involvement and cooperation in the class creates an equal learning.

LLS have been defined as "specific actions consciously employed by the learner for the purpose of learning language" (Griffiths, 2007). Other than that, Oxford (1999) described learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations". According to Rubin (1975), strategies have been described as techniques or devices learners use to gain knowledge or as actions or steps toward achieving a given objective (Cohen, Weaver, & Li, 1996; Oxford, 1990). In defining LLS, several authors emphasize the role of consciousness (Cohen, 1998; Cohen et al., 1996; Macaro, 2006). Cohen (1998) argues, "The element of consciousness is what distinguishes strategies from those processes that are not strategic".

Cohen (1998) stated that learners are aware of their use of language learning strategy with the explicit goal of improving their knowledge and gain better understanding of target language. Oxford's (1990) language learning strategies classification is widely referred to in the field of language learning. In addition, she looked at the aim of language learning strategies as being oriented towards the development of communicative competence. Oxford's classified LLS into two main categories: direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies comprise of memory, cognitive and compensation strategies while indirect strategies include metacognitive, affective and social strategies.

Language-learning strategies (LLS) have been defined as 'operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information' (Oxford 1990). In her Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), strategies are comprised of two major classes: direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies include memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, while indirect strategies are composed of metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. According to Oxford (1990), learning strategies are "specific

Journal of Personalized Learning, 3(1) 2020, 71-78.

actions taken by the leaner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations".

Second language learner strategies encompass both L2 learning and L2 use strategies. Taken together, they constitute the steps or actions selected by learners either to improve the learning of an L2, the use of it, or both. Language-use strategies actually include retrieval strategies, rehearsal strategies, "cover" strategies, and communication strategies. What makes the definition for language-learning and language-use strategies broad is that it incorporates those actions that are clearly aimed at language learning, as well as those that may well lead to learning but which do not presumably have learning as their primary goal. Whereas language-learning strategies have the explicit goal of assisting learners in improving their knowledge in a target language, language-use strategies focus primarily on employing the language that learners have in their current interlanguage (Cohen, 1996).

Strategy use was also found to be significantly related to gender, learner language proficiency, and degree of liking English. Degree of liking English, which was a sign of motivation according to the researchers, turned out to have the strongest effect on strategy use (Liu, 2013). On the basis of all of these studies it appears that high achievers display greater use of metacognitive strategies to manage their own learning than do low achieving learners, and thus that there is a strong correlation between this type of strategy and language learning achievement (Suwanarak, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses quantitative research approach using survey method. The questionnaire is adapted in order to suit the research questions and objectives of the study. The quantitative method enables researchers to uphold this in the field, as it has a systematic procedures. The participants of the study were thirty successful third semester students of Polytechnic of Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah, Shah Alam. These students were selected based on their academic performance in their third level and involvement in the teaching learning process. The survey was conducted by distributing the questionnaires to these students. The students were given clear explanation before they attempted the questionnaire. The survey was used to cover up the four skills.

A slightly modified version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), version 7, (Oxford, 1990) is use to examine the types and frequency of use of language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990). The SILL is divided into six categories of strategies: memory- storing and retrieving information (9 items), cognitive- understanding and producing the language (14 items), compensation- overcoming limitations in language learning (6 items), metacognitive- centring and directing learning (9 items), affective- controlling emotions, motivation (6 items), and social-cooperating with others in language learning (6 items). It employs a five-point Likert-scale: 1= never or almost never true of me, 2= generally not true of me, 3= somewhat true of me, 4= generally true of me and 5= always or almost always true of me. The Cronbach alpha for the SILL was estimated to be .91.

The lecturer administered the questionnaire during a regular class period. The full descriptive instructions regarding the procedures of administration were provided to and discussed with the lecturer before the administration. The data was analysed using SPSS 21. Frequency, means, and standard deviation were employed to identify the strategies used, as well as the participants' demographic information. To identify the significance of the difference between gender and strategy factors of the polytechnic students, a one-way between groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Based on this study finding, the students in the current study seem to be relatively less sophisticated language learning strategy users, using all six categories of strategies at moderate levels. There are two possible explanations. First, the participants in this study learn English in a classroom setting and do not need it for daily life. Thus, it was not urgent for them to use most types of strategies as it is for learners in other ESL setting. Second, it might indicate that this sample did not consist of language learners who were as sophisticated as other groups in other contexts as this may be due to the lack of an input-rich environment. With regard to each specific category of strategies, we can clearly observe some relevant differences in the preference for cognitive strategy use. The cognitive strategies are use more than any other type of strategies with a frequency rating of 3.69 and a SD of 0.51. The results (Table 1) showed that cognitive and metacognitive strategies are used significantly more than all other categories (p=.001). On the other hand, affective and compensation strategies are the least preferred strategies.

Journal of Personalized Learning, 3(1) 2020, 71-78.

Table 1. Frequency rating of LLSs used by all subjects of different levels

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Gender	30	1	2	1.5	.093	.509
Ethnic	30	1	3	1.9	.162	.885
Memory	30	2.78	3.44	3.0519	.03185	.17443
Cognitive	30	3.14	6.21	3.6929	.09336	.51136
Compensation	30	1.67	2.83	2.1889	.05966	.32676
Metacognitive	30	3	4	3.5111	.04871	.26679
Affective	30	1.83	3.17	2.4333	.07350	.40258
Social	30	2.17	3.33	2.6333	.05617	.30763
Valid N (listwise)	30					

Oxford (1990) suggested that cognitive strategies are essential in learning a new language because these strategies work directly on incoming information. In the current study, the cognitive strategies are typically found to be the most popular strategies among language learners. The second most frequently used strategies among the subjects were metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive (mean =3.51, SD=0.26) strategies are actions that allow learners to control and coordinate their own learning. Other than that, cognitive strategies are essential in learning a new language; these strategies range from repeating to analysing expressions to summarising (Oxford, 1990).

With all their variety, cognitive strategies are unified by a common function: the manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner (Dansereau, 1985; Rigney, 1978). According to Chamot (as cited in Wenden, 1987), these types of strategies are typically found to be the most popular strategies with language learners. An example of a cognitive strategy is comparing elements (sounds, vocabulary, grammar, etc.) of the new language with elements of one's first language to determine similarities and differences.

According to Mona (as cited in Vandergrift, 2003), the social/affective strategies are defined as the techniques that listeners use to collaborate with others, to verify understanding or to lower anxiety. Parallel with Habte-Gabr (2006), he believed that social/affective strategies are those which are non-academic in nature and involve stimulating learning through establishing a level of empathy between the instructor and student. They consist of factors such as emotions and attitudes. It was essential for listeners to know how to reduce the anxiety, feel confident in doing listening tasks and promote personal motivation in improving listening competence (Vandergrift, 1997).

Compensation strategies were reported to be the least preferred strategies in the current study with mean = 2.18 and SD = 0.32. They allow learners to make up for gaps in their knowledge when producing or comprehending the new language. Language learners use compensation strategies such as guessing, using gestures, and using synonyms to maintain good communication, even when they lack a complete knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and other language elements. Moreover, compensation strategies, such as guessing a word, are intended to make up for an inadequate repertoire of grammar and, specifically, of vocabulary. Beginners are not the only ones who use guessing: advanced learners and even native speakers use guessing when they have not heard something well enough. These compensation strategies for language production help learners to use the language by overcoming knowledge gaps and continuing to communicate authentically, thus becoming more fluent in what they already know (Oxford, 1990).

Many researchers have found that females appear to use a wider range of strategies than males (e.g. Oxford et al., 1988; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Green & Oxford, 1995; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). Strategies that focus on social interaction skills seemed to be more popular among female learners than among males (Politzer, 1983).The results of the current study (Table 2 and Table 3) revealed that there were no statistically significant differences in the use any of the six categories except the memory strategies, as females reported using those strategies significantly more often than males. This finding may indicate that the females in this study may have the ability to memorize things easier than the males, which may also reflect females' ability side in real life. Ehrman & Oxford (1989) found that female learners made greater use of functional practice strategies, strategies for searching for and communicating meaning, and self-management strategies. The absence of a

Journal of Personalized Learning, 3(1) 2020, 71-78.

gender effect on strategy use for the other five categories (cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, affective, and social) was not expected. It should be borne in mind that other studies such as Lou (1998) and Peng (2001) showed no significant gender differences.

Table 2. One-way MANOVA for gender and the six strategies

Descriptive Statistics

	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
memory	Male	3.0667	.17213	15
	Female	3.0370	.18144	15
	Total	3.0519	.17443	30
Cognitive	Male	3.5619	.20714	15
	Female	3.8238	.67971	15
	Total	3.6929	.51136	30
compensation	Male	2.1444	.30775	15
	Female	2.2333	.34960	15
	Total	2.1889	.32676	30
metacognitive	Male	3.5407	.29357	15
	Female	3.4815	.24367	15
	Total	3.5111	.26679	30
affective	Male	2.4667	.48876	15
	Female	2.4000	.30732	15
	Total	2.4333	.40258	30
social	Male	2.6889	.33845	15
	Female	2.5778	.27362	15
	Total	2.6333	.30763	30

Table 3. One-way MANOVA for gender and the six strategies

Multivariate Tests[a]

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent Parameter	Observed Power[c]
Intercept	Pillar's Trace	1.000	7219.02	6.000	3.00	.00	1.000	43314.1	1.000
	Wilks'	.000	9[b]	6.000	0	0	1.000	72	1.000
	Lambda	14438.0	7219.02	6.000	3.00	.00	1.000	43314.1	1.000
	Hotelling's	57	9[b]	6.000	0	0	1.000	72	1.000
	Trace	14438.0	7219.02		3.00	.00		43314.1	
	Roy's Largest	57	9[b]		0	0		72	
	Root		7219.02		3.00	.00		43314.1	
			9[b]		0	0		72	
Gender	Pillar's Trace	.824	2.345[b]	6.000	3.00	.25	.824	14.071	.227
	Wilks'	.176	2.345[b]	6.000	0	9	.824	14.071	.227
	Lambda	4.690	2.345[b]	6.000	3.00	.25	.824	14.071	.227
	Hotelling's	4.690	2.345[b]	6.000	0	9	.824	14.071	.227
	Trace				3.00	.25			
	Roy's Largest				0	9			
	Root				3.00	.25			
					0	9			

a. Design Intercept + Gender
b. Exact statistic
c. Computed using alpha = .05

The results showed that these students were low- to medium-level users of strategies. The results in this study on strategy use indicated a high preference for cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Similar results were obtained by Shmais (2003), Hong-Nam & Leavell (2006), and Abu-Radwan (2011), showing that, overall, the students prefer cognitive and metacognitive strategies over other types, and the least preferred strategies were affective and memory strategies. The use of metacognitive strategies must be supported in curricula design, especially through the beginning stages of learning a second/foreign language, where obtaining some type of declarative knowledge is critical to create "heightened understanding of *what* and *how* of successful language learning" (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006, p. 412).

Journal of Personalized Learning, 3(1) 2020, 71-78.

Participants reported difficulty in dealing with anxiety related to language learning. The women in the current study appeared to utilise their social networks as a means of support. While male participants apparently did not prefer to talk to their peers about their feelings, students might benefit from an opportunity to journal for a few minutes at the end of each learning session about how they felt about class and their performance on that day. This may help students to express feelings in a more private way and recognise how those feelings may have impacted the day's learning. In addition, as trust is built between teacher and student, the instructor may request access to journal entries, which would provide an additional useful source of information in mediating students' progress. Unlike previous studies, gender did not have a significant effect overall on the use of language learning strategies except in their use of social strategies, where females reported using social strategies significantly more than males.

According to Oxford (1996), learning strategies are "specific actions taken by the leaner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations". Indeed, fostering appropriate use of learning strategies and further increasing the frequency of strategy use are essential if students are to become more independent and effective learners. As the main findings revealed significant relations between strategy use frequency, foreign language anxiety, and motivation, some important implications should be noted.

First, through strategy assessment lecturers can help their students recognize the power of using language learning strategies for making learning quicker, easier, and more effective. Language lecturers need to know the appropriate uses and limitations of each assessment technique. Multiple techniques are to be encouraged whenever the time and resources are available according to the students' level of proficiency. When time and resources are restricted, lecturers should use the most reliable and valid strategy assessment measure that they can for the purposes they have defined. When the purposes include tapping the "typical" or general strategy use of an individual student or a group, strategy questionnaires like the *SILL* can be extremely helpful. If much more precise measurement of highly task-based strategy use is the purpose, then other measurement tools are required.

Second, the effect of anxiety on language learning is significant and cannot be ignored. In the present study, language anxiety was found to have a similar level of association with the actual language proficiency. In addition, its level of correlation with perceived proficiency is comparable to that between perceived and actual proficiency, except that anxiety has a negative impact on the other studied variables while the impact of actual language proficiency is positive. More efforts and attention are needed by language instructors to help students prone to higher anxiety levels cope with its potentially debilitating effects. Students in the high-anxiety level seldom employed affective strategies; similarly, the use of affective strategies by those with low perceived ability level was also in the low-frequency range.

Utilization of affective strategies has not seemed to receive as much attention as metacognitive or cognitive strategies from researchers, instructors, or even students in the past. An awareness and use of affective strategies should be fostered among language students, particularly if they are identified as anxious learners, as this type of strategies may help them better control their emotional states and sustain motivation to learn. Language learning is not just cognitive and metacognitive. It involves much more from the learner.

Third, based on the information from strategy assessment, lecturers can interlace strategy instruction into regular classroom events in a natural, comfortable, but explicit way. Lecturers must also keep in mind differences in motivation, learning style, gender, and other factors that affect learning strategy use. Other than that, lecturers need to be judicious in their selection of strategies to use in instruction, and existing research can provide good clues for this selection. For example, one research shows that paying attention and actively using the language for writing seem to be widely appropriate strategies in most contexts and for most students of learners.

Finally, perceived competence plays an influential role in enhancing language learning. Liu (2013) proposed that one useful motivational strategy in the language classroom is to encourage positive self-evaluation. Language instructors should treat students with greater patience, particularly encouraging those with underachieving performance to attribute their unsatisfactory achievements to the inappropriate use of learning strategy or lack of effort rather than academic incompetence.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is critical that learning strategies be considered when planning courses, teaching students, and designing classroom research. Appropriate learning strategies should be among the first considerations of any ESL/EFL lecturer or researcher who wants to enhance student learning. Lecturers need to have more

background on how to use such information in the classroom. Here is a clear opportunity for researchers to better translate their findings into materials to be used in the classroom. Particularly important is more information on how students from different cultural backgrounds and different countries use language learning strategies in order to boost students' motivation and anxiety level to speak better and confidently in public.

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