

The Use of Language Learning Strategies: A Case Study of Undergraduate Students in a Private University

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were to investigate the language learning strategy use of undergraduate students at Bangkok University, compare their language learning strategies use classified by gender, experience of studying English, and subjects, and study the relationship between their learning strategy use and English language ability. The data were collected from 400 students enrolling in EN 013 and EN 311 in the first semester of 2012 by Oxford's Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire. The data were analyzed by means, standard deviations, t-tests, and Pearson Correlation. The findings revealed that the overall use of language learning strategies was at a moderate level. In addition, students with different gender and experience of studying English did not use language learning strategies differently at the significance level of .05. However, statistically significant differences were found in overall strategy use and in all categories between students taking two English courses. That is, the overall language learning strategies use of the students studying EN 013 was higher than those studying EN 311. It was also found that high proficient students tended to use fewer learning strategies while low proficient students tended to use more learning strategies.

Key words: *language learning strategies, undergraduate students, private university*

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งศึกษาการใช้กลยุทธ์ในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยกรุงเทพ เปรียบเทียบการใช้กลยุทธ์จำแนกตามเพศ ประสบการณ์ในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ และวิชาที่เรียน รวมทั้งศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการใช้กลยุทธ์ในการเรียนกับความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษ เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลได้แก่แบบวัดกลยุทธ์ในการเรียนภาษาของ Oxford เพื่อเก็บข้อมูลจากนักศึกษาจำนวน 400 คนที่ลงทะเบียนเรียนวิชา EN013 และ EN311 ในภาคการศึกษาที่ 1 ปีการศึกษา 2556 และนำข้อมูลมาวิเคราะห์ด้วยโปรแกรม SPSS เพื่อหาค่าเฉลี่ย ส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน ค่าที และค่าสหสัมพันธ์ของเพียร์สัน ผลการวิจัยพบว่ากลยุทธ์ในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาอยู่ในระดับปานกลาง ปัจจัยด้านเพศและประสบการณ์ในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษไม่มีผลต่อการใช้กลยุทธ์ดังกล่าว อย่างไรก็ตาม พบว่ามีความแตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติในภาพรวมและในรายด้านของการใช้กลยุทธ์ระหว่างนักศึกษาในสองรายวิชา กล่าวคือนักศึกษาที่เรียนวิชา EN013 ใช้กลยุทธ์ในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษมากกว่านักศึกษาที่เรียนวิชา EN311 นอกจากนี้ ยังพบว่านักศึกษาที่มีความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษสูงใช้กลยุทธ์ในการเรียนภาษาน้อยกว่านักศึกษาที่มีความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษต่ำ

คำสำคัญ *กลยุทธ์ในการเรียนภาษา นักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี มหาวิทยาลัยเอกชน*

INTRODUCTION

English language plays an increasingly crucial role in many countries around the world; and Thailand is no exception. As Thailand prepares itself to step across the threshold to be part of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in the next few years, the role of English is becoming even more crucial. However, despite the efforts put into the learners throughout at least six years of studying English, the outcome remains unsatisfactory as seen from the scores of 21.80 from Ordinary National Education Test (O-Net) of Matthayom 6 (Grade 12) students in the academic year of 2011 as revealed by the Office of Basic Education Commission (Obec) (Poor ONet scores ‘could reflect, 2012, p. 1). Moreover, a survey of adult English proficiency by the Office of the Education Council (ONEC) stated Thailand ranked 42nd out of 44 countries – below Vietnam (39th), and Indonesia (34th), with Malaysia the top ASEAN country at No. 9 (English skills below ASEAN partners, 2012, p. 1). Thus, it can be clearly seen that Thailand is in urgent need to reform its education system at all levels to bring it to international standard ahead of the AEC in 2015.

Therefore, there has been a shift within the field of language learning and teaching to place greater emphasis on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching. In this regard, how learners process new information and what kinds of strategies they employ to understand it are becoming of primary concern. Language abilities can be developed if students know how to learn and acquire knowledge. Learning strategies are methods taken by students to enhance and achieve their own learning. Strategies are especially important for language learning as they are tools for developing language competence and achieving language learning goals (Pawapatcharaudom, 2007). Appropriate strategies result in encouraging English proficiency and greater self-confidence. As White (2007) stated, “learners develop language ability by constructing a personally meaningful interface with the learning context, and that strategies play a key role in this regard.” Cohen (2011) supported the idea with five reasons for language learner strategies: to enhance learning; to perform specified tasks; to solve specific problems; to make learning easier, faster and more enjoyable; and to compensate for a deficit in language proficiency. As they play an important role in helping learners develop their ability to achieve their goals, language learning strategies of Thai students have been examined by a number of researchers (Pringprom, 2008; Pannak and Chiramamee, 2011; Khamkhien, 2006). Moreover, language learning strategies, like other skills, can be taught to second language learners. Successful learners have to put their whole persons into all aspects of the target language: the content, the culture, the way of thinking and behaving (Brown, 2007). Therefore, this process requires not only what has been instructed in the classroom, but also the real life situations outside the classroom. Understanding the students’ language learning strategies will be of great benefit for the teacher to design appropriate language learning

activities to upgrade students' language proficiency to achieve the ultimate goal with appropriate content and enjoyable activities. The executives who deal with policy and decision making can also help students overcome their difficulties, improve their language skills and meet their academic goals. Furthermore, this aspect of study has never been examined before in Bangkok University. For these reasons, the researcher would like to investigate the language learning strategies of Bangkok University students to help them master the language more rapidly and effectively.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the language learning strategy use of undergraduate students at Bangkok University
2. To compare students' language learning strategy use classified by gender, experience, and subjects
3. To study the relationship between students' learning strategy use and their language ability

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Learning Strategies: Definition and Categories

Language learning strategies have been defined by many experts in many ways. Oxford (1990) stated that language learning strategies are the often-conscious steps or behaviors used by language learners to enhance the acquisition, storage, retention, recall, and use of new information. They are also specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques used by students to enhance their own learning (Oxford & Ehrman, 1988; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). The idea is confirmed by Chamot (1987) as "techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning, and recall of linguistic and content area information". Brown (2007) also illustrated that "strategies" are specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information, whereas Davies (1995) viewed strategies as physical or mental actions employed consciously or unconsciously with the intention of facilitating learning. Language strategies are also viewed by Cohen (2011) as thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance. In short, language learning strategies are the means students use to help them achieve the proficiency of a language.

To identify the learners' language learning strategy use, a questionnaire was developed by Oxford namely "Strategy Inventory for Language Learning" (SILL). According to Oxford (1990, 1993), language learning strategies are classified into two main types: direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are the strategies that need the learners' mental processing of the new language. They help the learners to understand and use the new language more easily. On the other hand, indirect strategies are those that help the learners to master the new language without being directly involved.

Direct language learning strategies include three different aspects and purposes. Memory strategies help the learners to better memorize the new vocabulary by making use of visual images, sorting, word association, arranging information and reviewing while cognitive strategies help the learners to manage or transform the new language through practicing, analyzing or summarizing. Compensation strategies are for learners to fill the gap of the new language both in words and grammar by guessing meaning, using words with similar meaning or finding different ways to express the new language.

Indirect language learning strategies consist of three different aspects. Metacognitive strategies help the learners to plan how to study the new language effectively by scheduling or looking for opportunities to use the language. Affective strategies help the learners to deal with the anxieties they have when studying a language by trying to relax when they feel afraid of using English, writing down their feelings in a diary, or giving a reward to themselves when they can do well in English. Social strategies are the techniques the learners use to expose themselves to the new language by asking questions in English, asking English speakers to correct them when they talk, or learning the culture of the target language.

Apart from Oxford's SILL, there are two more recent language learning strategy scales. O'Malley (1985) categorized these strategies into three groups namely metacognitive, cognitive and socioaffective strategies. Metacognitive strategies include such skills as planning for learning, thinking about the learning process while learning, monitoring of the learner's production or comprehension, and evaluating the learning after an activity is completed. Cognitive strategies focus on specific learning tasks and how the learner manipulates such skills to help them learn the language such as through repetition, resourcing, translation, grouping, note-taking, and imagery. As for socioaffective strategies, these stress socializing and interacting with others in a real situation. Stern (1992) points out five language learning strategies on the scale: management and planning, cognitive, communicative, interpersonal, and affective strategies, which are more detailed than that of O'Malley's.

Related Research

Language learning strategies have been an interesting issue for years and there are many pieces of recent research conducted to study the use of language learning strategies and relating them to gender, English proficiency, and prior experience of English.

Language learning strategies employed by students has been widely examined. The findings from a number of researches showed that the participants used strategies at a moderate level (Nikoopour, Farsani & Neishabouri, 2001; Ok, 2003; Zhao, 2009; Zare, 2010). Sheu, Wang and Hsu (2013) studied the language learning strategies of 238 EFL non-major sophomores at a technological university. The result showed that the students significantly used more indirect than direct strategies with compensation ranked as the most frequently-used strategy and cognitive as the least frequently-used strategy. This finding was confirmed by Saitakham (2010), Khamkhien (2006), Mochizuki (1999), Zhao (2009), Pringprom (2009), and Ok (2003) who illustrated in their studies that compensation was the most frequently used strategy. However, the researches of Goh and Foong (1997), Nikoopour, Farsani and Neishabouri, 2001, Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006), Alqahtani and Alhebaishi (2010), and Radwan (2011) revealed that students used metacognitive strategy the most. Nguyes and Godwyll (2010) supported this view with a research of 75 international students at Ohio University revealing social and metacognitive strategies as the most frequently used strategy while affective and memory strategies were the least used.

As for the relationship between English learning strategies and gender, it has been found that gender played an important role in the strategies used and female students used more strategies than male students (Mochizuki, 1999; Pringprom, 2009; Zare, 2010). Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) have also reported that, of 55 ESL students of differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds, females tended to use affective and social strategies more frequently than males. This idea was supported in the research with 175 ESL students from the People's Republic of China conducted by Goh and Foong (1997). The finding showed that female students significantly used more compensation and affective strategies than male students while Liu's (2004) research pointed out that memory and affective strategies were used more by females. Sheu, Wang and Hsu (2013) indicated in their research with non-English major sophomores at a technological university that females can significantly do better than males in memory and affective strategies. Gender influence was also confirmed by the researches of Hou (2008), Green and Oxford (1995), and Ok (2003). In contrast, Radwan (2011) revealed that male students used more social strategies than female students. Additionally, Rahimi, Riazi and Saif (2008) found no effect of gender on the use of language learning strategies among Persian learners.

In many studies, English proficiency level has been found to be another factor influencing English learning strategies. Park (1997) worked with 332 Korean university students to examine the relationship between language learning strategies and their English proficiency determined by the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores and found that the two factors are related in all six categories of language learning strategies, both separately and totally, with significant correlation with the TOEFL scores especially with cognitive and social strategies. Lai (2009) applied the English Language Placement Test to determine the proficiency level of 418 EFL learners in Taiwan and the result showed a significant effect of proficiency level on strategy choice and use and that the more proficient learners used more learning strategies. The outcome also pointed out that the more proficient learners preferred metacognitive and cognitive strategies the most and memory strategies the least; on the other hand, the less proficient learners favored social and memory strategies the most and cognitive as well as metacognitive strategies the least. Jones, Pibulchol and Wongyounoi (2010) studied English learning strategies of three groups of English proficiency level (very high, high and moderate) of Thai Matthayomsuksa 6 of five to ten English subject's Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) scoring schools in the three consecutive academic years of 2005-2007. The findings revealed that the strategies most frequently used by the very high proficiency students were cognitive and metacognitive strategies while compensation strategies were the most popular among those with high and moderate proficiency; memory strategies were found the least frequently used among all. Moreover, the majority of researches discovered the correlation between language learning strategies and proficiency level and indicated that more proficient or successful learners use cognitive and metacognitive strategies more than the less proficient ones (Mochizuki, 1999; Mingyuan, 2001; Griffith, 2003; Gan, Humphreys & Hamp-Lyons, 2004; Lai, 2009; Hou, 2008; Zhao, 2009; Jones, Pibulchol & Wongyounoi, 2010; Pannak & Chiramanee, 2011; Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012). English proficiency was found highly correlated with metacognitive strategies while it was lowly correlated with memory (Liu, 2004; Alqahtani & Alhebaishi, 2010).

The learners' prior experience of English is one of the factors influencing language learning strategy use. Although there were not as many researches in this area as other factors, the past experience in learning a language can help the learners find more successful methods to cope with the problems encountered (Ramsay, 1980). The idea was proven by the study of Purdie and Oliver (1999) that experience in studying a language is one important factor influencing the choices of language learning strategies. In addition, they found that the participants who had been in Australia for a longer period of time had significantly higher mean scores for cognitive and memory strategies. This finding is in line with that of Oppen, Teichler, and Carlson (1990), Oxford and Nyikos

(1989), and Oxford (1996) confirming the important role of experience in studying a language toward language learning strategy use. Wharton (2000) also reported the same idea when his research with bilingual foreign language learners in Singapore in language learning strategy use revealed that all the participants used a great deal of social strategies when compared with affective strategies. Furthermore, Ok (2003) studied the impact of school year on language learning strategy use and found that third-year students had higher mean scores than first-year students in compensation and memory strategies whereas the first-year students received more in metacognitive, cognitive, affective and social strategies. However, the research conducted by Pringprom (2009) revealed that the course levels did not show significant differences on the use of strategies.

METHODOLOGY

1. Population and Samples

The population of this study was 2,380 undergraduate students who enrolled in EN 013: English in action and EN311: English for Business Purposes I in the first semester of 2012 academic year. The samples were 400 students to be selected using stratified Random Sampling technique. The sample size was calculated from Taro Yamane table. A 95% of confidence level was used with a precision rate of $\pm 5\%$. When the population is 2,500, the samples should be at least 345. However, the researcher agreed to employ 400 samples in this study. 200 students studying EN013 are those who have passed EN012 and the other 200 from EN311 are students who have passed EN014.

2. Research Instruments

The instrument of this study was a self-assessing questionnaire, comprising two main sections. Section 1 contained demographic data of gender, grade that student received in the previous English course, experience of studying English, attitude towards the subject, and duration of self study after class. Section 2 included the SILL questionnaire created by Oxford (1990) comprising memory (items 1-9), cognitive (items 10-23), compensation (items 24-29), metacognitive (items 30-38), affective (items 39-44), and social strategies (items 45-50). The second section which was in the form of five-point rating scale investigated the language learning strategies the students used in studying English. This part asked the students to rate how frequently they used each strategy ranging from “the most frequent” to “never at all” for the students to check.

2.1 Constructing the Questionnaire

The researcher translated an original English version of the questionnaire into Thai. To be sure that all translated items remained intact, three experts specializing in language teaching

were asked to check the meaning in Thai. A meeting was conducted to review, reconcile and harmonize the translation. After that, the backward translation technique was used to ensure its accuracy. This reconciled translation was then translated back into English by two translators. Next, the researcher together with the three experts reviewed and compared the backward translation with the original English questionnaire.

2.2 Piloting the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was then piloted with 40 undergraduate students who were not the target group during the first semester of academic year 2012 at Bangkok University and calculated for proper reliability indexes by using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients as shown below:

Table 1 Reliability Indexes by using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

Category	Reliability Value
1. Memory Strategy	.751
2. Cognitive Strategy	.903
3. Compensation Strategy	.751
4. Metacognitive Strategy	.917
5. Affective Strategy	.691
6. Social Strategy	.819
Total	.951

3. Data Analysis

Data were statistically recorded and analyzed by SPSS/Windows program. Personal data of the respondents were calculated for frequency and percentage. The use of language learning strategies was analyzed quantitatively for means and standard deviations and presented in a table based on the following ranges: 1.00-1.50 = very low, 1.51-2.50 = low, 2.51-3.50 = moderate, 3.51-4.50 = high, 4.51-5.00 = very high. T-tests were employed to compare students' language learning strategy use in terms of gender, subject and experience of studying English. Pearson's Correlation was applied to discover the relationship between language proficiency and the use of language learning strategies.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The participants of this research were 400 undergraduate students enrolled in two subjects (EN013 & EN311) of Bangkok University. Of these, 65.3% were female and 34.8% were male. The experience in studying English of the majority (92.3%) was between 6-10 years while that of 7.8%

was between 1-5 years. When categorized by the attitude toward English, 45.8% of the respondents reported they like the English subject while 31.5% of them like it at the moderate level with 11.3% dislike, 9.8% strongly like, and 1.8% strongly dislike respectively. In addition, 45.5% of them spent 15-30 minutes of after-class study while 27% of them never did.

Table 2 Personal Information of Respondents' Shown in Frequency and Percentage

	Frequency	Percentage
1. Gender		
- Male	139	34.8
- Female	261	65.3
2. Experience of studying English		
- 1-5 years	31	7.8
- 6-10 years	369	92.3
3. Attitude towards the subject		
- Strongly dislike	7	1.8
- Dislike	45	11.3
- Neither dislike nor like	126	31.5
- Like	183	45.8
- Strongly like	39	9.8
4. Duration of self-study after class		
- Never	108	27
- 15-30 minutes	182	45.5
- 1-2 hours	88	22.0
- 3-4 hours	13	3.3
- More than 4 hours	9	2.3

Table 3 indicates that the overall mean score of students' use of language learning strategies was at a moderate level ($M = 2.97$). When considering all strategies, it was found that the six language learning strategies were also used at a moderate level. Among the six strategies, the mean scores could be arranged in order of usage as follows: metacognitive strategy ($M = 3.33$), social strategy ($M = 3.02$), affective strategy ($M = 2.97$), compensation strategy ($M = 2.94$), memory strategy ($M = 2.92$) and cognitive strategy ($M = 2.76$).

Table 3 Means and Standard Deviations of Students' Use of Learning Language Strategies Shown in Six Categories

Language Learning Strategies	Mean	S.D.	Level of Importance	Rank
1. Memory Strategy	2.92	.62	moderate	5
2. Cognitive Strategy	2.76	.67	moderate	6
3. Compensation Strategy	2.94	.71	moderate	4
4. Metacognitive Strategy	3.33	.78	moderate	1
5. Affective Strategy	2.97	.73	moderate	3
6. Social Strategy	3.02	.81	moderate	2
Total	2.97	.55	moderate	

Table 4 indicates that the overall mean score of female students using language learning strategies was higher than male students ($M = 2.99, 2.92$) in every aspect except cognitive strategy. The t-test was employed to examine a significant difference in language learning strategy use between male and female students. The result reveals that there were statistically significant differences in language learning strategies between them in metacognitive and affective strategies at the level of .05. This means that female students used more metacognitive and affective language learning strategies than male. However, no significant difference was found in overall language learning strategy use between male and female students.

Table 4 Comparisons of Mean Scores of Students' Language Learning Strategies Use Classified by Genders

Language Learning Strategies	Variable	n	Mean	S.D.	t
1. Memory Strategy	genders male	139	2.84	.71	-1.86
	female	261	2.96	.57	
2. Cognitive Strategy	genders male	139	2.79	.74	.70
	female	261	2.74	.63	
3. Compensation Strategy	genders male	139	2.94	.75	-.13
	female	261	2.95	.70	
4. Metacognitive Strategy	genders male	139	3.17	.81	-2.93*
	female	261	3.41	.75	
5. Affective Strategy	genders male	139	2.87	.73	-2.03*
	female	261	3.02	.72	
6. Social Strategy	genders male	139	3.00	.84	-.31
	female	261	3.02	.79	
Total	genders male	139	2.92	.61	-1.23
	female	261	2.99	.51	

* $p < .05$

Table 5 shows that the overall language learning strategy use of the students studying EN 013 was higher than those studying in EN 311 ($M = 3.09, 2.85$) in every aspect. When the t-test was employed to examine a significant difference in language learning strategy use between the two groups, it revealed that there were statistically significant differences in all aspects at the level of

.05. This means that students studying EN013 used more language learning strategies than those studying EN311.

Table 5 Comparisons of Mean Scores of Students' Language Learning Strategies Use Classified by Subjects

Language Learning Strategies	Subject	n	Mean	S.D.	t
1. Memory Strategy	EN 013	200	3.04	.66	3.82*
	EN 311	200	2.80	.60	
2. Cognitive Strategy	EN 013	200	2.86	.71	3.10*
	EN 311	200	2.66	.62	
3. Compensation Strategy	EN 013	200	3.08	.72	3.85*
	EN 311	200	2.81	.69	
4. Metacognitive Strategy	EN 013	200	3.48	.73	3.84*
	EN 311	200	3.18	.80	
5. Affective Strategy	EN 013	200	3.13	.67	4.39*
	EN 311	200	2.81	.76	
6. Social Strategy	EN 013	200	3.11	.79	2.37*
	EN 311	200	2.92	.81	
Total	EN 013	200	3.09	.55	4.56*
	EN 311	200	2.85	.53	

*p<.05

Table 6 shows that the students with more experience in studying English used more language learning strategies than those with less experience (M = 2.98, 2.88). The t-test was employed to examine a significant difference between students who had 1-5 and 6-10 years of experience. The result indicates that no statistically significant difference was found in all strategies.

Table 6 Comparisons of Mean Scores of Students' Language Learning Strategies Use Classified by Experience

Language Learning Strategies	Experience	n	Mean	S.D.	t
1. Memory Strategy	1-5 years	31	2.78	.82	-1.00
	6-10 years	369	2.93	.60	
2. Cognitive Strategy	1-5 years	31	2.72	.80	-.34
	6-10 years	369	2.76	.66	
3. Compensation Strategy	1-5 years	31	2.83	.86	-.88
	6-10 years	369	2.95	.70	
4. Metacognitive Strategy	1-5 years	31	3.20	.92	-.96
	6-10 years	369	3.34	.77	
5. Affective Strategy	1-5 years	31	2.95	.78	-.14
	6-10 years	369	2.97	.73	
6. Social Strategy	1-5 years	31	2.93	.86	-.63
	6-10 years	369	3.03	.80	
Total	1-5 years	31	2.88	.72	-.89
	6-10 years	369	2.98	.54	

*p<.05

The next factor which should be taken into account was students' language proficiency. In this study, there were students who are more and less proficient in English. The grade that they received in the previous English course was transformed into numbers as follows: A= 4, B+= 3.5, B= 3, C+= 2.5, C= 2, D+= 1.5, D= 1. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test was used to discover whether there was a statistically significant relationship between GPA and the use of language learning strategies. Table 7 shows that there was a negative relationship between students' language proficiency and their language strategy usage at the .05 level (-0.306 , $P = .000$). This means that the higher grade the students gained, the fewer learning strategies they used.

Table 7 The Relationship between Language Proficiency and the Use of Language Learning Strategies

	Language Proficiency	Strategy Use
Language Proficiency	1.00	-.306**
Strategy Use		1.00

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The finding that Bangkok University students' learning strategy use was at a moderate level is in line with the studies of Nikoopour, Farsani and Neishabouri (2001), Ok (2003), Zhao (2009), and Zare (2010) who found that the participants in their studies use the strategies at a moderate level. This is probably because English courses at the university did not provide students with how to use learning strategies. When the curriculum was transformed to be more student centered, many activities were included to reach learning goals. Time in class was, therefore, spent on learning four skills, completing the given tasks and making presentations. In addition, the finding points out that the most frequently used strategies of the participants were metacognitive while the least frequently used were cognitive strategies. The former result was supported by Goh and Foong (1997), Nikoopour, Farsani and Neishabouri (2001), Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006), Alqahtani and Alhebaishi (2010), and Radwan (2011). The latter finding corresponded with the study of Sheu, Wang and Hsu (2013) in that students used cognitive strategies the least. The reason why they used metacognitive strategies the most was probably because the English courses provided a great deal of scores on projects outside class. These students had passed their previous fundamental courses which also emphasized the activities. By applying the prior experience, they knew how they would plan the projects effectively so as to gain good grades. Planning involved setting goals and objectives of the projects, deciding where to acquire the knowledge, organizing the information and looking for people who can speak English for interviews. They learned to produce scripts and

reports. In contradistinction, the teaching-learning English in Thai curriculum nowadays highlights students' communicative abilities without paying much attention to grammar and drilling language patterns, which are why the students used cognitive strategies the least.

Gender is one of the factors that should be discussed. Female students were found to use more affective strategies than male students. This is similar to the researches of Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006), Goh and Foong (1997), and Liu (2004). This result can be explained by the nature of females; that is, they are more talkative than males. When they talk, they are more motivated or encouraged by their classmates or even by themselves. However, gender did not have any effect on students' use of language learning strategies because no significant difference was found between the two groups. This finding is consistent with that in Rahimi, Riazi and Saif's work (2008), revealing that male and female Persian learners did not use different learning strategies.

The factor of taken course was found to have an effect on language learning strategies use. That is, students taking a fundamental course used more language learning strategies than those studying in an advanced course. The clarification of this finding can be seen in the nature of these two subjects. EN013 is one of the general English courses mainly focusing on the four skills of language learning with wide variety of contexts whereas EN311 is a business English subject for students majoring in Accounting, Business Administration and Economics. Consequently, the contexts in EN311 place emphasis on business only with more practice in writing business reports and correspondence, certain vocabulary and patterns in business field. Students in this course tended to exercise fewer strategies when compared with those taking EN013. As such, those in the advanced course should be provided with more learning activities which can develop the use of language learning strategies. For instance, when students are assigned to undertake any project, the teacher should make interviewing foreigners part of the requirements and schedule the submission of their project plan a few weeks before the presentation as well as let them writing about how they feel about the project during the preparation period every week via e-mail to the teacher. In addition, students may be given an opportunity to undertake the whole process of the project such as inviting a guest to share the idea related to their field of study and let them write a report about what they gain from the project.

It is interesting to learn that the students with more experience in studying English used more language learning strategies than those with less experience. This is consistent with Ramsay (1980); Purdy and Oliver (1999); Oppen, Teichler, and Carlson (1990); Oxford and Nyikos (1989); and Oxford (1996); Wharton (2000); and Ok (2003). The obvious explanation is that the experience in any of the four skills makes the learners become accustomed to the language; hence, the experienced learners can study the language more rapidly than the less experienced. This can also

be explained on the basis of prior experience which can help the learners find more successful methods to cope with the problem encountered (Ramsay, 1980). However, the difference was not found statistically significant. This might be because the number of students having experience had an impact on the result. The majority of students (92.3%) had 6-10 years of English learning experience while some of them (7.8%) had experience of 1-5 years.

Language proficiency is another factor that plays a significant role in students' strategy use. In this study, it is interesting to find that high proficient students tended to use fewer learning strategies while low proficient students tended to use more learning strategies. This finding is in contrast with many research results in that more proficient learners used more learning strategies than the less proficient ones (Lai, 2009; Jones, Pibulchol & Wongyounoi, 2010; Mochizuki, 1999; Mingyuan, 2001; Griffith, 2003; Gan, Humphreys, & Hamp-Lyons, 2004; Hou, 2008; Zhao, 2009; Jones, Pannak & Chiramanee, 2011; Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012; Liu, 2004; Alqahtani & Alhebaishi, 2010). A reason for this finding is that low proficient students generally tried hard in order not to fail or receive an F. One of the strategies they employed was attending tutorial classes provided by the Language Institute. Thus, they had an opportunity to learn how to employ useful strategies in those classes. Moreover, students who were not good at English had more chances to use learning strategies to improve their English performance while high proficient students did not need to adjust themselves. Since their background knowledge of English was good and the current course was not much different from the previous course, it was rather easy for them to reach the goal of study.

CONCLUSION

To be in line with the competitiveness expected as a result of joining AEC in 2015, it is necessary that the executives in all educational institutes launch new policies and projects to promote the level of English proficiency of Thai students. According to the study, language learning strategies are considered very important factors for foreign language learners. Not only do they help the students acquire the language more easily and effectively, but they also play a vital role to make them successful learners. To develop direct language learning strategies, learning through games is a fun way for teachers to increase their stock of vocabulary and develop students' skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Moreover, indirect learning strategies should be applied in all language teaching curriculum since students will have opportunities to use realistic English and gradually absorb the language automatically. Outside classroom activities such as interacting with foreigners, watching soundtrack movies, listening to songs and providing positive learning

atmosphere will also give them more motivation and confidence in exercising their knowledge gained from their English class in the real world.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings from this study suggest some areas that may be investigated by further studies. Firstly, the use of learning strategies might be affected by culture. Thailand is a collective society where children are taught to respect and be obedient to adults while Western cultures tend to exhibit individualistic values. In undertaking future studies on learning strategies, the issue of culture should be taken into consideration. Secondly, there should be a study investigating the use of language learning strategies classified by students' motivation and learning styles. Students with different learning styles may use different learning strategies to acquire knowledge. Using appropriate learning strategies will help to promote their motivation to learn and enhance their learning potentials. Lastly, further studies should be done to compare the use of language learning strategies among students in private and public universities. Since the nature of students in the two types of university is rather different as students in private universities need more guidance and support from the teachers in their study.



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