The Study of English Learning Strategies of English Major Students at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University

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Abstract

The purpose of this study aims to investigate the English learning strategies of the English major students at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University. The analysis was based on the data from 68 sample students taking English as their major of study. The instrument used for data collection was a set of constructed rating-scale questionnaires which had been reviewed by experts and improved from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version for Speakers of Other Language Learning English. The instruments were then administered to all sample groups. The mean and deviation were computed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) for windows-version 11.5 in order to analyze the collected data from the questionnaires.

From the result, it is shown that the six language learning strategies of the overall comparison of English language learning strategies find that the average scores of all strategies were at a high level.

1. Memory strategies find that the most used strategies are the lesson revision (3.26), and the least used is using flashcards to remember new English word (2.79).

2. Cognitive strategies find that the most used cognitive process is watching TV and movies (3.61), and the least used is finding patterns in English (3.13).

3. Compensation strategies find that the learning strategy most used is guessing (3.64), and the one least used is creating a new word (2.66).

4. Evaluating strategies find that the strategy most used is to pay attention when someone is speaking English (4.04) and the strategy least used is the learning schedule (3.01).

5. Emotions managing strategies find that the strategy most used is the self-encouragement (3.97), and the least used is the strategy of talking with others about learning English (3.33).

6. Learning with others strategies find that the most used strategy is asking others (3.76), and the least used is asking the English teacher to help correct a mistake (3.48).

Keywords: English Learning Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, Social strategies, Memory Strategies, Compensatory Strategies, Affective Strategies, Meta-cognitive Strategies

Introduction

English is one of the most significant languages of the world because millions of people use English as an international language to communicate. English is not Thailand's national language and most groups only use it in academic institutions. Everyone has their own mother tongue, which may be acquired naturally from their environment. However, second or foreign languages may be learnt for some specific purposes for example, personal interest, furthering a career, or education. Language learning strategies are specific actions or techniques that students use to develop their progress in developing second or foreign languages. Learning strategies are techniques used by people who hope to achieve their goal in language learning. One significant factoring learning strategy is that many societies have become more globalized, so an international language becomes a communicative medium. For this reason learning strategies come to play an important role. Because of inadequate knowledge and frequent failure (failure of language success), some students may fail to achieve learning a language after years of language study due to lack of vocabulary or lack of motivation. (Christopher Brumfit, 1990)

Oxford (1990) stated that successful learners seem to use a wider variety of language learning strategies than unsuccessful learners. Meanwhile, a number of studies also report on the relationship between learning strategies and students' performance. The studies exposed that selecting appropriate strategies could enhance the learners' performance in second language learning. As a result, it is quite clear that the conscious use of effective strategies is related to language achievement and proficiency in second language learning. Moreover, it is crucial for language teachers to understand the language learning strategies in order to encourage students to build up their learning performance, to facilitate their use of learning strategies effectively and to provide more effective instruction to assist less successful students to become more successful in language learning.

As a result of this interest there will be support for beginners who are learning a second language, particularly English, to succeed in learning a language. The findings will explain the different learning strategies in each student used to be successful in language learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose is to study English learning strategies of English major students at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University.

Research Question

What learning strategies do English major students at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University use to achieve the target goal?.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the body of educational knowledge by increasing the understanding of English language learning strategies, and provides useful information for the teachers and students. Students can use appropriate learning strategies to improve their English learning, and finally achieve their learning success.

Literature Review

This case study concentrates on learning strategies stated by Oxford (1990). Oxford sees the aims of language learning strategies as being oriented towards the development of communicative competence. Oxford divides language learning strategies into two main classes, direct and indirect, which are further subdivided into 6 groups. In Oxford's system, metacognitive strategies help learners to regulate their learning. Affective strategies are concerned with the learner's emotional requirement such as confidence, while social strategies lead to increased interaction with the target language. Cognitive strategies are the mental strategies learners use to makesense of their learning. Memory strategies are those used for storage of information, and compensation. Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of language learning strategies is shown in the following:

1. Direct Strategies

1.1 Memory strategies relate to how students remember language, to store and retrieve new information.

- Creating mental linkages
- Applying images and sounds
- Reviewing well
- Employing action

1.2 Cognitive strategies relate to how students think about their learning, to understand and produce new language by different means ranging from repeating to analyzing and summarizing.

- Practicing
- Receiving and sending a message
- Analyzing and reasoning
- Creating structure for input and out

1.3 Compensation strategies enable students to make up for their limited knowledge, to overcome limitations in target language skill.

- Guessing intelligently
- Overcoming limitation in speaking and writing

2. Indirect Strategies

2.1 Meta-cognitive strategies relate to how students manage their own learning, to help learners regulate their cognition and to focus: plan and evaluate their progress.

- Centering your learning
- Arranging and planning your learning
- Evaluating your learning

2.2 Affective strategies relate to students' feeling, to gauge their emotional reaction and to learn and lower their anxiety.

- Lowering your anxiety
- Encouraging yourself
- Taking your emotional temperature

2.3 Social strategies involve learning interaction with others.

- Asking question
- Cooperating with others
- Empathizing with others

Research Methodology

1. Population

The population covered all students at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University, and the sample consisted of 68 English major students at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University by simple random sampling.

2. Research Instrument

The constructed instrument was a questionnaire adapted from SILL by Oxford (1990) version for speakers of other languages learning English. It covered six types of strategies, cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, memory strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. Each part of the SILL represents a group of learning strategies. The questionnaire consisted of thirty items. Each item was scored on the Likert five scale ranging from 5 = Always, 4 = Usually, 3 = Often, 2 = Sometime, 1 = Never. The questionnaire is divided into 2 sections: 1) Demographic data; It is concerned with individuals and academic characteristics, for instance, age, gender, fields of study, and prior experience in English language learning, and 2) English Learning Strategies; This section attempts to consider the learning strategies as solutions that participants employ in achieving the target goal. The questionnaire was designed according to Oxford (1990) on six categories of second language learning strategies including cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory-related strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data collection procedures were as follows: Firstly, the questionnaires are checked for wording, content and construct validity, and reliability by the experts. Secondly, students were requested to answer the questionnaire individually in English class. The time limit to complete the questionnaire was 15-20 minutes. Finally, 68 questionnaires were distributed to the 68 students to at the beginning of September, 2014.

The collected data were analyzed to answer two research questions by descriptive analysis, such as percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviation. It is employed to analyze the data from the questionnaire.

Results of the Study

The overall use of English language learning strategies of English major students at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University was at the medium level (Mean = 3.39 and S.D. = .48). The most frequently used was the Emotions Managing Strategies (3.66), followed by Learning with others Strategies (3.63), Evaluating Strategies (3.55). The least frequently used was Cognitive Strategies (3.37), followed by Compensation Strategies (3.18) and Remember Strategies (2.98) respectively.

Viewed from individual items of memory strategies it was found that the most used strategies are the lesson revision (3.26), and the least is the use of flashcards to remember new English words (2.79).

Considering each item of cognitive strategies it was found that the most used cognitive process is watching TV and movies (3.61), and the least used is finding patterns in English (3.13).

Considering individual items of compensation strategies it was found that the learning strategy most used is guessing (3.64) and the one least used is creating a new word (2.66).

Considering individual items of evaluating strategies find that the strategy most

used is paying attention when someone is speaking English (4.04) and the strategy least

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Conclusion and Discussions

The focus of this study was on the use of direct and indirect strategies. Both direct and indirect strategies should be practiced together for efficient learning. Direct strategies are language learning strategies that directly involve the target language, or language being learned. All direct strategies require mental processing of the language, but the three groups of direct strategies: memory, cognitive and compensation strategies, and indirect strategies metacognitive, affective and social strategies. All things being equal, some students will be more successful than others in learning a second or foreign language. The study purpose was to study or investigate English language learning strategies of English major students. From the results of the analysis of the six languages learning strategies used for English language learning strategies of English major students at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University. This study is a quantitative and qualitative research. It will use questionnaires as a research instrument to collect data. The 68 questionnaires were distributed to the 68 students to answer the questionnaires.

The results of the study indicate that the English major students at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University used Emotions Managing Strategies, followed by Learning with others Strategies, Evaluating Strategies. The least frequently used was Cognitive Strategies, followed by Compensation Strategies, and Remember Strategies. The strategies of each people are different because is a person's approach to learning and using information. Learning strategies are used by students to help them understand information and solve problems.

1. Memory strategies, the most used strategy by students is to regularly review English lessons. This is consistent with the opinion of the students; the majority of the students develop English skill by reading a difficult English book, because memory strategies can help the learner store new information in memory and retrieve it later. According to Oxford (1990), reviewing well; structured reviewing by reviewing at carefully spaced intervals. In this strategy, the learners may spend 10 minutes at first then spend an hour to review, because reviewing the lesson are keys to helping students learn and retain important material learned during class. These strategies help prepare students for tests. According to the problems that the students to encounter, they are cannot remember and don’t know English words, but they can pass that problem because they used memorize or remember the word by open dictionary. The probable cause for this is that memory strategies are often used for memorizing vocabulary and

structures in initial stages of language learning, but that learners need such strategies much less when their store of vocabulary and structures has become larger.

2. Cognitive Strategies, cognitive strategies involve manipulation and transformation of the language through reasoning, analysis, notetaking, functional practice in naturalistic setting, formal practice with structures and sounds. The cognitive process students used the most is watching TV and movie. This is consistent with the opinion of the students; they practice English skills by using the media such as news, watching soundtrack movies, TV shows and surfing the internet. English movies can help the students to boost their vocabulary and oral comprehension, and in the present media has become one of the most important parts of our daily life. The students can study, learning and reading some information from the Internet all the time. So, cognitive strategies are one type of learning strategy that learners use in order to learn more successfully, and this strategies can increase the efficiency and confidence with which the students approaches a learning task, as well as the students ability to develop a product, retain essential information, or perform a skill. While teaching cognitive strategies requires a high degree of commitment from both the teacher and learner, the results are well worth the effort.

3. Compensation Strategies, compensati on strategies encourage the learners to guess the missing word or meaning in the context, using gestures when they cannot think the right word in English. The result of this study showsthat most students use guessing most as their learning strategy. This is consistent with the opinion of the students about English language problems. They cannot remember and don’t know English words. The researcher thinks English is hard to study for Thai students, because they aren't native speakers and they have knowledge limitations. These strategies are communication strategies used by learners to compensate for limitations in their language. Different kinds of learners have preferences for different kinds of learning strategies. So, the students need compensation strategies to help them with learning strategies and developing English vocabulary. On the other hand, the way to improve and expand their vocabulary is to learn more words, and they should aim to learn a new English word every day. So, the teacher should focus on vocabulary in the class for developing English words. Oxford (1990) contends that compensation strategies of any kind, even though they might be used for language use, nevertheless aid in language learning as well. After all, each instance of second language use is an opportunity for more second language learning.

4. Metacognitive strategies, evaluating strategies is a part of metacognitive strategies. It is providing a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process such as centering, arranging, planning, and evaluating. The majority of the students used the pay attention strategy when someone is speaking English. It is a good way to practice English skills, because listening or looking a lot can help the students absorb English more, such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation or other strategies. As students become aware of how they learn, they will use these methods to efficiently acquire new

information, and consequently, become more ofafree thinker. According to O'Malley &Chamot (1990), "metacognitive" means beyond, beside, or with the cognitive. Therefore, metacognitive strategies are actions which go beyond purely cognitive devices, and which provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process. So, metacognitive strategies is the methods used to help students understand the technique they learn, and the teachers who use metacognitive strategies can positively impact students who have learning disabilities by helping them to develop an appropriate plan for learning information.

5. Affective strategies help learners gain better control over their emotions, attitudes, and motivations related to language learning, such as identifying one's mood and anxiety level, talking about feelings, rewarding oneself for good performance, and using deep breathing or positive self-talk. The majority of the students encourage their self to speak English even when they are afraid of making a mistake. This is consistent with their problems. They have no confidence, are not assertive, and are shy and embarrassed to speak English in front of their self for studying. The researcher thinks that should avoid this bad feeling. Shy is not good feeling for developing your competence, especially in speaking English. The students should speak much what you want to speak, don not care about your speaking whether wrong or right, and never think about your structure first or form in your speaking. It is the first thing that you should practice for learning English, and then you will be brave to speak English.

6. Social strategies involve other people in the language such as asking questions and cooperating with others. Wenden and Rubin (1987), social strategies are "activities learners engage in which afford them opportunities to be exposed to and practice their knowledge". In other words, social strategies are any activities that allow you to use the target language. So, most students used strategies to ask for help from other people, it is one way to help them to have success in English. Helping together in the class is the easy way for the students, but it possibly limits correct information. Students who do not know or use good learning strategies often learn passively and ultimately fail in school. So, the students should ask the English teacher more often to correct their mistakesinstead of asking other people to make sure of their English.

In addition to strategies that can help students to improve their language skills, styles and strategies help determine a particular learner's ability and willingness to work within the framework of various instructional methodologies. Learning strategy instruction focuses on making the students more active learners by teaching them how to learn, and how to use what they have learned to solve problems and be successful. When the learner consciously chooses strategies that fit their learning style and the second language task at hand, these strategies become a useful toolkit for active, conscious, and purposeful self-regulation of learning. So, the six strategies were significantly associated with second language proficiency in studies.

Further Study Recommendations

Based on the major findings of the present study, the researcher recommends the following avenue for future research:

First, researchers who conduct further studies should be educated about the satisfaction and expectations of Strategic Learning English of English major students at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University. If they are happy or enjoyed studying English, they will be successful in English language learning.

Second, researchers who conduct further studies should educate themselvesaboutall the skill levels of English or grades of English major students at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University, because the findings will explain the different learning strategies in each student used to be successful in language learning.

Third, further studies can compare language learning strategies used by students from different types of education program English major students at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University, because the results from the future study can be useful for educator to design activities to match with the nature of each type of educational program.

Fourth, further studies should study Strategic Learning English and learning English problems simultaneously English major students at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University. In order to, analyze and compare the problem of English learning affects perception Strategic learning English or not.

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