

Language Learning Strategies of ESL Students in Online Distance Learning Environment

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ABSTRACT

When learning, learners can use language learning strategy (LLS) either knowingly or unknowingly to process the new knowledge in their language class. Oxford published the Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) in 1990. Cognitive, Memory, Affective, Meta-cognitive, Compensatory, and Social interventions are the six broad categories in this inventory. Various studies have since been carried out with an emphasis on LLS in L2 learning. LLS has been shown to assist learners in developing their language skills. Although technology advances, it has also an effect on the teaching and learning process. L2 learners can now learn the language in a technology-mediated environment thanks to the advancement of technology. As a result, this study looked into L2 learners' preferences for LLS while learning English in an online distance setting. This study included 78 participants, with questionnaires serving as the research method. When learning English online, learners used more Compensation strategy in terms of LLS choice. There is also a significant gap between male and female students. In contrast to males, females used more LLS. Female students preferred to use the Metacognitive approach, while male students preferred to use the Compensation strategy. This study's results have pedagogical implications to English teaching and learning.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies; ESL; Online Distance Learning; L2 Learners.

1.0 Introduction

As we are now venturing in the different educational approaches in this technology era, songs remain to be a valuable tool in language teaching and learning. Many researchers agree that using songs in the language classroom can help to motivate learners and make learning environment more interesting. Songs have been a valuable tool in language learning at different levels of students (Alisaari & Heikkola, 2017). However, songs have normally been used in the classroom to teach a certain language skill and few studies have been carried out to examine the effectiveness of a lesson in which one song is utilized and integrated into the learning of all the language skills in a classroom. Therefore, this study aims at developing activities that integrate the four major language skills through the use of a song in the classroom at the tertiary level.

The process of learning a language varies from person to person. Rubin (1975) claims that good language learners learn differently than poor language learners. From there, researchers have attempted to learn more about the basic learning methods used by language learners. When learning, learners can use language learning strategy (LLS) either consciously or unconsciously to process the new knowledge in their language course. There is a large body of evidence linking the use of effective language learning strategies to academic achievement. A diverse collection of learning strategies and metacognitive strategies are known and used by effective, self-regulated learners to control themselves and their learning activities (Zimmerman, 1994). Despite the fact that much has been learned about students' language learning strategies in recent years, little is understood about how they are used in today's online distance learning environment.

Research Objectives

1. To identify language learning strategies of L2 learners in online distance learning environment.
2. To identify the preference of language learning strategies of L2 learners according to gender.
3. To identify the preference of language learning strategies of L2 learners according to faculties.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Language Learning Strategies

Learning strategies are described in a variety of ways by researchers. Language learning strategy, according to an earlier concept by Rigney (1978), is characterised as the actions or routines used by language learners to acquire, record, absorb, remember, and use new knowledge. It is characterized by Wenden (1991 in Mohammad Hossein Gerami & Shiva Madani Ghareh Baighlou, 2011) as steps or operations taken by learners when learning a new language and organising their efforts. Language learning strategies are described as “the 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 Oxford (1990). Cook introduced a new definition of language learning strategy in 2001, describing it as a principle of choice made by learners in learning the language, which has an impact on their learning. All these different definitions of language learning strategy are based on the same principle. It refers to the steps, processes, or techniques that English language learners use, apply, and adapt to aid in their language learning. Oxford established the Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL), which includes six categories: cognitive, memory, affective, metacognitive, compensatory, and social strategies. Metacognitive methods, according to Oxford, are the ability to schedule, arrange, organise, concentrate, and evaluate one’s own learning. It gives the learner power over their own cognition by allowing them to prepare, track, and assess their own progress. Affective strategies help learners regulate their emotions, motivation, and attitudes toward language learning, while social strategies improve engagement with the target language, enabling learners to be more committed to learning with others. Cognitive strategies are the skills of highlighting, analysing, and summarising messages that enable learners to comprehend and create a new language based on their own understanding and through a variety of means. Memory strategies are a direct approach in which the learner is in control of his or her own learning strategies for memorising form and function, vocabularies, and sentence structure. By focusing on nonverbal communication to convey meaning, compensation strategies assist learners in overcoming information gaps and continuing communication. Numerous previous studies have found a positive and significant connection between language learning strategies and language proficiency (Muhammad Irfan & Nur Alyani, 2015; Al-Maktary, 2018). Via the use of the Web 2.0 medium, Ibrahim, Prain, and Collet (2014) discovered that ESL learners embrace and use language learning strategies in order to develop their ESL competence. Rao (2016) discovered that learners’ English proficiency has a significant relationship with the amount of strategies

they use, with high achievers using more strategies than low achievers. Lin, Zhang, and Zheng (2017) found that students' learning strategies have an effect on their learning outcomes in an online language learning study. According to Sartika, Santihastuti, & Wahjuningsih (2019), more efficient students prefer metacognitive strategy, while less efficient students prefer cognitive strategy.

2.2 Online Distance Learning

The landscape of language teaching and learning is evolving due to rapid technological advancements. Without having to see each other, teaching and learning can now be done online. One of the major drivers of distance learning has been the ease of online learning. "Online learning evolves as a product of distance education" (Malithong, 2005). Distance learning, online learning, web-based learning, e-learning, cyberlearning, and computer-based learning are all definitions with varying meaning (Moore et al., 2011). The word "online learning environment" is then used to refer to a group of similar learning concepts that take place on the Internet or require the use of the Internet (Moore et al., 2011). One distinguishing feature of e-learning is the separation of learner and instructor in a synchronised or non-synchronized class, which allows students to learn independently (Solak & Cakir, 2015). Distance learning, often known as distance education, is a new reality that provides educational institutions with challenges and opportunities, according to Mehrotra, Hollister, and McGahey (2001). It is a reality that offers students more choices about where, when, how, and from whom they learn. It is also a reality that allows an ever-increasing number of people to access education. According to Puteh (2008), the advantages of online distance learning include 1) 24-hour access to knowledge, 2) up-to-date content materials, 3) self-paced learning, 4) personalised courses, and 5) cost-effectiveness. Online distance learning provides excellent mobility, a wide range of study options, and increased scheduling flexibility for students and the institutions that deliver these options (Aslanian et al., 2019).

2.3 Language Learning Strategy in Online Distance Learning

Although much has been discovered in recent years about students' learning strategies, little is known about how they are used in today's online distance learning environment. Even in this digital world, language learning strategies are still considered important and essential for successful language learning, and strategies for a variety of digital learning challenges exist (Oxford & Schramm, 2007). Zariski & Styles (2000) found that adaptive strategy appeared to control students' approaches to e-learning. When students seek assistance in the

learning process, they use an adaptive strategy. An analysis of language e-learners in Turkey was conducted by Solak & Cakir (2015). Learners used metacognitive and memory strategies the most, while cognitive and affective strategies were used the least, according to the findings. In online environments, students who make good use of their time, are mindful of their learning patterns, objectively examine content, and remain optimistic about understanding the learning material despite difficulties are more likely to achieve higher academic grades (Broadbent & Poon, 2015).

3.0 Methodology

This study is exploratory in nature and data is obtained using a survey questionnaire, which will be used in the analysis and investigation. Students from both the social sciences and the sciences filled out the questionnaire, which yielded results. This study's respondents are university students who are actually enrolled in an English course as part of their curriculum. A total of 78 respondents were involved with this study and were chosen using a convenience sampling method. All of the respondents studied English in an online distance learning environment. The entire teaching and learning process took place entirely online. Questionnaires were adapted from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (1990). The SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) (Oxford, 1990) was developed as a method for determining the frequency with which students use LLS. SPSS is used to analyse the gathered data from the respondents.

4.0 Findings

This research focuses on L2 learners' language learning strategies in an online distance learning environment.

Table 1: Mean for Language Learning Strategies

LLS	Mean
Memory	3.4316
Cognitive	3.5720
Compensation	3.5872
Metacognitive	3.5769
Affective	3.3419
Social	3.4658

Using mean and standard deviation, the data obtained from the respondents was analysed to determine the most preferred LLS. Compensation strategy is the most widely used LLS among learners, with the highest mean value (3.5872). Affective strategy is the least used LLS, with a mean value of 3.341. However, as shown in Table 1, the difference between each strategy's mean value and the others is not major. This indicates that learners also employ other LLS in their L2 learning and they were equally used.

Table 2: Mean for Language Learning Strategies Based on Gender

LLS	Male	Female
Memory	3.2611	3.6111
Cognitive	3.2827	3.8765
Communication	3.2850	3.9053
Metacognitive	3.1861	3.9883
Affective	3.1083	3.5877
Social	3.1833	3.1083

Data is analysed according to gender to learn more about the respondent's preferred language learning strategies. The most preferred learning strategy for male students is compensation, with a mean value of 3.2850, whereas the most preferred learning strategy for female students is metacognitive, with a mean value of 3.9883. Affective strategy is the least favoured LLS for men, with a mean value of 3.1083. With a mean value of 3.1083, female students seem to have the least preference in social strategy.

Table 3: Mean for Language Learning Strategies Based on Faculty

LLS	FPDP	FKA	FKM
Memory	3.4330	3.5979	3.2346
Cognitive	3.6351	3.6447	3.3504
Communication	3.6769	3.7143	3.2444
Metacognitive	3.7179	3.5873	3.2593
Affective	3.5043	3.3849	3.2083
Social	3.5684	3.4365	3.4365

The following three faculties provided data for this study: Fakulti Pengurusan dan Perniagaan (FPDP), Fakulti Kejuruteraan Mekanikal (FKM), and Fakulti Kejuruteraan Awam (FKA). As data is analysed by faculty, it is discovered that

FPDP students have the highest tendency to use metacognitive strategy, with a mean value of 3.7179, whereas FKA students prefer communication strategy, with a mean value of 3.7143. With a mean value of 3.3504, FKM students are more oriented toward cognitive strategy. Memory, with a mean value of 3.4330, is the least favoured strategy for FPDP students. With mean values of 3.3849 and 3.2083, respectively, affective strategy appeared to be the least common among FKA and FKM students.

5.0 Conclusions

When learning English in an online distance learning environment, this study was able to illustrate the learners' preference for their LLS. According to the findings, respondents prefer to use a compensation method while learning English in an online environment. L2 learners use compensation strategy to compensate for their poor knowledge of the language with something else. Where the exact word is unknown, compensation strategy is primarily an ability of guessing meanings from context in reading and listening, as well as using synonyms and gestures to communicate meaning (Oxford, 1990). When faced with a language challenge, L2 learners tend to make educated guesses, according to the finding of this study. This study could help educators and students develop lessons that are tailored to the learners' learning styles. Teachers and educators can implement a variety of language learning strategies so that students can choose the ones that best fit their personalities and are relevant to their learning objectives. Students who recognise the value of language learning and employ a range of strategies will find new ways to learn and improve their language skills.

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