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TYPE OF STUDY PROGRAM AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A CASE IN THE NORTHEAST OF THAILAND

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Abstract

The objectives of this research work were to scrutinize the frequency of undergraduates' use of Language learning strategies (LLSs) and to examine whether the selections of LLSs vary greatly in relation to students' study program types and the patterns of significant variations, if they exist at all. Subjects for the present study were 579 students. Language Learning Strategy Questionnaire (LLSQ) was used to assemble data. Descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and Chi-Square Tests were employed to analyze the obtained data. The results of this study provided LLS usage of undergraduates were identified as moderate frequency level. It was found that students' type of study program had effects on their choices of LLSs. Non-English Education undergraduates tended to use strategies significantly more frequently than English Education undergraduates. For category level, it was found that significant variations were found in Prep and Under categories.

Keywords

Language Learning Strategies, Type of Study Program, University Students

1. Introduction

These days, language learners are able to acquire language everywhere as they like. Still, language learning strategies are important techniques for EFL/ESL learners. Several linguists and scholars (e.g. Jindaprasert, 2003; Tappoon, 2008; and Toomnan, 2017) point out language learning strategies are skills that enable language learners to improve and get better at language acquisition. Hence, it is crucial and useful to confess and enrich language learners' consciousness of strategy use in compliance with their motivation levels (Chang and Liu, 2013).

Overseas, several scholars (Lee, 1994; Park, 1999; Oxford and Nyikos, 1989; Fewell, 2010; Minh, 2012; Zhou, 2014) have attempted to scrutinize other influences that are possibly correlated to the use of LLSs employed by language learners, for example, education level, major, age, course level, nationality, motivation, tolerance of ambiguity, language achievements, importance of English, English-learning self-image, extra-class support, personality types, emotional intelligence, strategy awareness, and enjoyment of English learning.

In Thailand, a number of studies (e.g. Jindaprasert, 1997; Intaraprasert, 2003 and 2004; and Prakongchati, 2007) have been conducted to examine undergraduate university students' use of LLSs. However, few past research works (e.g. Gomaratut, 2016) have been conducted on LLS use among English majors. Particularly, there are no studies carried out on the relationship between type of study program and English major students' LLS use in the northeast of Thailand. To fill this gap, this present study aims to explore the link among students' study program type and their use of language learning strategies.

2. The Review of Literature

'Language learning strategies' (LLSs) was first introduced by Rubin (1975), with research on the good language learner. At the time it was thought that success of ESL/EFL learners' use of strategies could help teachers know how to teach their less successful students to learn languages more effectively.

LLSs can be either observable behaviours (e.g. Rubin, 1987; Ellis, 1994; Minh, 2012; Zhou, 2014; and Toomnan, 2017) or unobservable behaviours (e.g. Nunan, 1991; Ellis, 1994; Zhou, 2014; and Toomnan, 2017). LLSs define as observable behaviours are special or deliberate actions that not only enable language learners to acquire, understand, or maintain new information more effective, but also help them to be more transferrable to different

circumstances. (e.g. Chamot, 1987; Oxford, 1990, O'Malley and Chamot, 1995). The latter group describes LLSs as thoughts or psychological manners which learners employ to study and practice the target language (e.g. Nunan, 1991).

Stern (1975) proposed a list of ten strategies of good language learners. In 1992, 10 LLSs were recategorized into 5 main categories. These include: Management and Planning Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, Communicative – Experiential Strategies, Interpersonal strategies, and Affective strategies. Stern (1975) found that both the cognitive and affective strategies were taken into account, which includes emotions, motivations and personality.

Rubin (1975) introduced the classification of language learning strategies which consist of 2 main strategies: direct and indirect strategies. Classification of Language Learning Strategy by Rubin (1975, 1981) was classified derived from the characteristics of psychology (e.g. broad-mindedness for abstruseness and understanding others). In addition, Oxford (2011) offered a new model of language learning. The model of Oxford (2011) consisted of four main categories: metastrategies, cognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. Interestingly, social aspect has been used to help language learners to cope with language problems in terms of situations, communication, and culture.

3. Methodology

The purposes of this investigation were to explore the frequency and types of Language learning strategies (LLSs) that undergraduates employed when acquiring language, to examine the correlation between the choices of LLSs and students' type of study program and to discover significant difference patterns in the frequency of reported strategies employed in accordance with the investigated variable.

3.1 Questions

1. What is the frequency of the LLSs stated being employed by undergraduates?
2. Do student's choices of strategies to deal with language learning vary significantly in relation to their type of study program?

3.2 Variable

Students' type of study program

3.3 Research Instrument

The Language Learning Strategy Questionnaire by Prakongchati (2007) was adopted in order to investigate students' type of study program according to language learning strategy use. Her questionnaire was suitable to the present study, regarding, the research context, the research subjects, and the focal point of the study.

3.4 Participants

In this investigation, the participants were divided into 2 groups: English-Education and non-English-Education. English-Education major refers to students who were pursuing a Bachelor Degree of Education. Non-English Education major refers to students who were studying in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences or the Faculty of Humanities (e.g. English for Business, English for Business Management). They were studying at Khon Kaen University, Mahasarakham University, Ubonrathani University, Mahasarakham Rajabhat University, Roi-Et Rajabhat University, and Nakornratchasima Rajabhat University. Yamane (1967)'s formula was employed to calculate sample size. As seen in Table 1, the sample size was 579 (329 English-Education students and 250 non-English-Education students).

Table 1: *Universities and Number of Participants for the Present Investigation*

No.	University	English Education	Non-English Education	Total
1.	Khon Kaen University	110	0	110
2.	Mahasarakham university	0	79	79
3	Ubonrajathani university	0	81	81
4.	Maha Sarakham Rajabhat University	0	90	90
5.	Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University	104	0	104
6.	Roi Et Rajabhat University	115	0	115
	Total	329	250	579

3.5 Data Analysis

According to Research Question 1, Descriptive statistics was used to find out the frequency of the LLSs reported being employed by university students. Meanwhile, ANOVA, and Chi-square tests have been used to analyze strategies that the students used with regard to study program type.

4. Results

Table 2: Variation in Overall LLS Use by Type of Study Program

Type of Study Program	English-Education (n=329)		Non-English-Education (n=250)		Sig.	Comments
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D		
Overall LLS Use	2.50	.41	2.60	.38	P < .05	Non-English-Education > English-Education

With respect to the students' type of study program, ANOVA results, presented in Table 2, show a significant difference between the English and Non-English-Education students. The mean frequency scores of the English and Non-English-Education majors are 2.50 and 2.60 respectively. Non-English-Education majors reported greater use of strategies than English-Education majors.

Variation in LLS Use in the Four Types in Relation to Type of Study Program

Table 3 reveals the significant differences in the mean frequency score of undergraduates' LLS employ by the Prep, Under, Imp, and Exp types in terms of type of study program.

Table 3: Variation in Use of LLSs in the Prep, Under, Imp, and Exp Types by Type of Study Program

Strategy Category	English-Education (n=329)		Non-English Education (n=250)		Significant	Comments
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation		
1) Prep	2.26	.54	2.45	.50	P < .01	Non-English Education > English-Education
2) Under	2.76	.55	2.87	.47	P < .05	Non-English Education > English-Education
3) Imp	2.62	.51	2.65	.50	N.S.	-
4) Exp	2.34	.51	2.39	.51	N.S.	-

According to Table 3, the table shows that differences in students' use LLSs in the Prep and Under types by type of study program. The use of strategies was more frequently reported by Non-English-Education undergraduates than English-Education undergraduates. Nevertheless, there were no statistically significant differences in the Imp and Exp types.

Variation in Students' Reported Use of Individual LLS Use by Type of Study Program

According to the Chi-square test results, thirteen out of forty-five LLSs varied significantly were found. Table 4 displays the differences in students' use of individual LLSs accordance with type of study program.

Table 4: Variation in Use of Individual LLSs by Type of Study Program

Individual LLSs	% of high use (3 and 4)		Observed χ^2
	English-Education	Non-English Education	
Used more by Non-English-Education students 13 LLSs)			
Exp42 Using a dictionary for vocabulary enrichment	69.0	76.4	$\chi^2 = 3.878$ P<.05
Prep3 Attempting to attend the class	57.4	72.0	$\chi^2 = 13.016$ P<.001
Under16 Consulting a dictionary	59.3	69.6	$\chi^2 = 6.557$ P<.01
Imp26 Watching English-speaking movies to drill listening comprehension without looking at the Thai subtitle	54.4	62.8	$\chi^2 = 4.108$ P<.05
Imp34 Preparing oneself before communicating with foreigners	47.7	56.4	$\chi^2 = 4.284$ P<.05
Prep5 Reviewing own notes/summary	42.2	50.8	$\chi^2 = 4.182$ P<.05
Prep4 Doing revision of the previous lessons	23.1	38.4	$\chi^2 = 15.924$ P<.001
Prep9 Practicing what is learned in class with the teacher	21.9	35.2	$\chi^2 = 12.595$ P<.001
Exp38 Having extra tutorials (e.g. attending classes a private school, taking short English courses abroad)	21.6	33.2	$\chi^2 = 9.824$ P<.001

Individual LLSs	% of high use (3 and 4)		Observed χ^2
	English-Education	Non-English Education	
Used more by Non-English-Education students 13 LLSs)			
Prep10 Discussing L2 learning problems with the teacher	22.2	31.6	$\chi^2 = 6.499$ P<.05
Prep6 Attempting to revise today lessons	19.1	26.0	$\chi^2 = 3.872$ P<.05
Prep2 Preparing oneself physically	20.7	29.2	$\chi^2 = 5.612$ p<.05
Prep1 Studying the course details beforehand	16.1	27.2	$\chi^2 = 10.570$ p<.001

Table 4 illustrates the significant differences in students' individual LLS use related to their type of study program. A greater percentage of students in Non-English-Education students than those English-Education students reported high usage of all 13 LLSs.

5. Discussion

For this present study, the results showed that non-English Education learners indicated employing strategies significantly more frequently than English-Education learners.

The first possible factor which might explain the significant difference was students' different concentration of study program. Although they are studying in English program, the two programs provide different concentration. The first one is Education oriented and the second one is Art oriented. With respect to the course content, English Education deals with English for language studies or for teacher training. Meanwhile, non-English Education is characterized by features such as the vocabulary used in specific areas and language structures common for specialized context use. The findings of previous studies (e.g. Green and Oxford, 1995; and Hsiao and Oxford, 2002) suggested that learners in different types of context improve language learning approaches. As suggested by Green and Oxford (1995), EFL and ESL learners might use different strategies patterns. Prakrongchati (2007) reported that differences in the use of language learning strategies associated to different learning disciplines.

The students' prior learning experience is another factor affecting their LLS use. Mariani (2010) states that language learners use certain strategies to deal with language problems depending on various factors, for example, the context of strategy use, personality, proficiency level, and exposure in language learning. According to the result of the present investigation, students with more language learning experience tend to employ LLSs more frequently than those with less language learning experience. This is in line with numerous scholars (Robertson et al, 2000; Hellsten, 2002; Wong, 2004; and Sawir, 2005) investigating the difficulties of language learners. Two of them (Wong, 2004 and Sawir, 2005) revealed that language learners were not confident to speak English because they were taught grammatical usage rather than communication skills.

The other possible factor affecting both groups of students' choices of language learning strategy use was individual learning styles. As stated by Cohen (2003) and Oxford (2003), learning strategies are particular ways to cope with language tasks in specific contexts; meanwhile, the styles of learning are common approaches to language learning. Besides, VanPatten and Benati and Vanpattern (2010) and Vaseghi et al (2012) state that learners have different ways to learn things, in which they perceive, absorb, process, and recall new information and skills. Some learners are fantastically quick at picking up language just by looking and listening; for some learners, it may take a little longer (Harmer, 2000). The results were consistent with a study by Wong and Nunan (2011), reported that learning styles did influence strategies of language learners.

In summary, the three hypothesized explanations: different concentration of study program, prior language learning, and individual learning styles are possible attributed to the major differences in students' LLS use in accordance with their type of study program.

6. Research Limitations

The present study aimed to explore the possible significant variation patterns at different levels in relation to type of study program yet, some limitations have also been found when conducting the research, which also shed some light for future research as follows:

- 1) Regarding the research participants, only 579 university students took part in the present study. It is hoped that if it is possible, more participants in different parts of Thailand, that is, North, East, West, South, and central can participate in the future research of language learning

strategies, so that the research findings could be more reliable and valuable. It is suggested that the future research should be replicated in other regions in Thailand, so that a more generalization would be made.

2) In this present study, the LLSQ was employed to gather data. Nevertheless, every gathering data method has its strengths and weaknesses; therefore, it would yield more in-depth information if other data collection methods, for example, classroom observation, diary studies, or think-aloud protocols to triangulate the results.

3) The present study has limited itself to probe LLS use in relation to study program type. As mentioned in the discussion part, other aspects, like students' different concentration of study program, learning styles and prior language learning experience have not been conducted whether these factors have effects on the use of LLSs of Thai students or not. Hence, those aspects should be taken into account in future research.

7. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

The importance of LLSs should be taken into account for both teachers and language learners. In order to meet students' needs on LLS use, teachers of English need to consider and design their language teaching activities focusing on appropriate LLSs for both English-Education and non-English-Education students. Teachers should stimulate and encourage students to use a wider range of LLSs. Most importantly, a pleasant language teaching atmosphere allows language learners to be more motivated to acquire language; this may lead them to hold optimistic or pessimistic attitudes toward language learning and may have effects on their choices of language learning strategy use.

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