

English Learning Strategies Among Thai Logistics Management Students

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Abstract

Understanding learning strategies used by learners helps teachers to advance pedagogy. However, an insufficient investigation has been dedicated to the exploration of learning strategies within the domain of logistics. The present study examined the English language learning strategies employed by Thai logistics management students enrolled at a Thai public university. To collect data, a questionnaire based on Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was presented to 79 Thai EFL learners via Google Form. The findings revealed that the participants highly relied on both direct (memory, compensation, and cognitive strategies) and indirect (metacognitive and affective strategies) strategies. These results hold significant implications for stakeholders within the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Keywords: *Learning strategies; memory strategies, compensation strategies; cognitive strategies; metacognitive strategies; affective strategies.*

Introduction

Despite English instruction being initiated at an early stage, extending over 16 years of formal education (from kindergarten to university), achieving fluency in English for effective communication remains uncertain for many Thai individuals. The Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI, 2022) categorized Thailand as having very low proficiency in English, ranked 97th globally. A comparative analysis with neighboring countries, such as Cambodia (ranked 94th), Myanmar (ranked 93rd), Indonesia (ranked 81st), Vietnam (ranked 60th), Malaysia (ranked 24th), the Philippines (ranked 22nd), and Singapore (ranked 2nd), underscores the critical nature of situation, indicating the restricted capacity of English usage in Thailand. Furthermore, The National Institute of Educational Testing Service reported that the English proficiency test results within Thailand, particularly were the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) scores in 2023, were distressingly low. The average English scores for Thai primary school students (N= 495,217) were 43.55, for Thai middle school students (N= 352,119) were 34.38, and for Thai high school students (N= 365,170) were 29.94 (<https://www.thaipbs.or.th/news/content/303749>). These alarming results sparked debates regarding the validity and consistency of the tests, as well as raising concerns about the teaching and learning practices withing English language classes in Thai schools (Noomura, 2013).

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Noom-ura (2013) conducted a study that shed light on the reasons behind persistent difficulties among Thai learners in mastering English. Notably, the competence of English teachers emerged as a significant factor, as they require further professional development and experience in effectively teaching the language. Additionally, insufficient teaching resources and instructional aids hindered the effectiveness of the teaching process.

Moreover, the attitudes and habits of students themselves contribute to the predicament. Many learners do not dedicate enough time to practice English independently and tend to rely heavily on their native language, engaging in translation and thought processes. Furthermore, limited exposure to English outside the classroom further compounds the issue.

The inquiry into the roles of learning strategies

Some previous studies have confirmed the vital role of learning strategies as a determining factor in effectively acquiring a second or foreign language. Chamot and Kupper (1989) suggested that successful learners are inclined to utilize strategies tailored to specific tasks, contextual demands, or individual learning needs. The most proficient learners exhibited a greater aptitude in employing strategies in a manner that was not only appropriate but also exhibited a broader spectrum, thereby contributing to successful task completion. Oxford (1990) further emphasized the significance of strategies in language learning, highlighting their function as tools for active, self-directed engagement, which, in turn, plays a fundamental role in the development of communicative competence. Moreover, Lee and Heinz (2016) suggested that an EFL context may necessitate the adoption of distinct language learning strategies, as per the unique demands and preferences of the learners involved.

The present study then aimed to investigate the learning strategies employed by Thai EFL students majoring in logistics management used during their pursuit of ESP course in the university setting, then compare its results with those that previously studied in different disciplines. The reason behind the selection of this particular sample resides in the important role of logistics as a driving force behind the progress of numerous nations, Thailand among them. Consequently, an investigation into the learning strategies employed by learners within this field holds the potential to unveil genuine data, thereby facilitating the development of a well-suited course in English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Literature reviews

In this section, definition and theories related to language learning strategies, classification of language learning strategies used in the present study, and some previous studies were discussed.

Definition and theories

Having emerged in the 1960s, the study of language learning strategies has garnered global attention and investigation. Various definitions of language learning strategies (LLSs) have been posited by scholars, as outlined below:

Firstly, Faerch and Kasper (1983) conceptualized LLSs as deliberate efforts aimed at developing linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language. Witrock & Association (1986) further expounded that learning strategies, pursued with the intention of facilitating learning, target the learner's motivation, affective state, as well as their approach to selecting, acquiring, organizing, or integrating new knowledge.

Wenden & Rubin (1987) defined LLSs as encompassing sets of operations, steps, plans, and routines employed by learners to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and

utilization of information. Building this perspective, Scarcella & Oxford (1992) characterized LLSs as specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques, such as seeking out conversation partners, or self-encouragement when facing challenging language tasks, employed by students to enhance their own learning.

Stern (1992) approached LLSs as activities consciously undertaken by learners to achieve specific learning goals, encompassing a broad range of intentional directions and strategies.

Furthermore, William & Burden (1997) identified LLSs as series of skills used with a particular learning purpose in mind. These skills encompass the ability to monitor the learning situation, respond accordingly, assess the context, plan, select appropriate skills or sequence them, coordinate their application, evaluate their effectiveness, and adjust the plan when necessary.

Lastly, Richards and Schmidt (2010) described LLSs as intentional behavior and cognitive processes employed by learners during their learning endeavors, aiming to improve their comprehension, learning, or retention of new information.

These diverse perspectives collectively contribute to the comprehensive understanding of language learning strategies and highlight the multidimensional nature of strategies employed by learners in their language acquisition endeavors.

Classification of language learning strategies used in the present study

Language learning strategies have been categorized by numerous scholars, each proposing similar or distinct taxonomies. For the current study, the taxonomy of language learning strategies presented by Oxford (1990) in the form of the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) was chosen. This taxonomy was preferred due to its comprehensive coverage of the diverse language learning strategies employed by learners to facilitate the acquisition of a new language. The SILL taxonomy classifies language learning strategies into two principal categories, namely direct strategies, and indirect strategies. Subtypes within each of these main categories are detailed as follows.

1) Direct strategies

1.1) Memory strategies (M)

- creating mental linkages (M1)
- applying images and sounds (M2)
- reviewing well (M3)
- employing action (M4)

1.2) Cognitive strategies (C)

- practicing (C1)
- receiving and sending messages (C2)
- analyzing and reasoning (C3)
- creating structure for input and output (C4)

1.3) Compensation strategies (Cp)

- guessing intelligently (Cp1)
- overcoming limitations in speaking and writing (Cp2)

2) Indirect strategies

2.1) Metacognitive strategies (Mc)

- centering your learning (Mc1)

- arranging and planning your learning (Mc2)
- evaluating your learning (Mc3)

2.2) Affective strategies (A)

- lowering your anxiety (A1)
- encouraging yourself (A2)
- taking your emotional temperature (A3)

2.3) Social strategies (S)

- asking questions (S1)
- cooperating with others (S2)
- empathizing with others (S3)

Previous studies

Used as a taxonomy in the current investigation, the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) proposed by Oxford (1990) has garnered global recognition among scholars interested in language learning strategies. Several studies have examined language learning strategies in various contexts, yielding valuable insights into learners' strategic approaches.

In a study conducted by Kotarpuh et al. (2012) among EFL business students. The findings revealed that affective strategies were the most frequently employed. Similarly, Pasalic (2013) explored the language learning strategies among EFL students of economics and business, identifying compensation and cognitive strategies as the most commonly used.

Iamla-ong (2014) investigated language learning strategies problems and strategies among Thai EFL students in tertiary education, and the results indicated that metacognitive, social, compensation, cognitive, memory, and affective strategies were used most frequently, respectively.

Hungyo (2015) examined language learning strategies among Thai business students, observing that students were consciously aware of their strategy use, with metacognitive strategies being commonly employed. Moreover, successful language learners utilized strategies extensively, leading to enhanced language learning outcomes.

Consistently, three studies in 2016 by Nguyen, Rardprakhon et al., and Saengaroon reported that metacognitive and social strategies were the most employed among learners.

Alhaysony (2017) explored language learning strategies employed by Saudi EFL students, finding that strategy use was in the low to medium range. Cognitive, metacognitive and compensation strategies were the most frequently used, while memory and affective strategies were least commonly used.

In 2018, Bessai examined the language learning strategies among Algerian university students and observed that senior students reported higher use of metacognitive strategies, while first-year students relied heavily on compensation strategies.

Phusum (2019) studied the English language learning strategies among Thai engineering students and found that those with higher English proficiency tended to use language learning strategies more frequently. Metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used, while compensation strategies were least employed.

Lastly, in 2022, Alrashidi assessed language learning strategies among Saudi EFL students and reported that strategies were used at a high level, with metacognitive

strategies being the most common and memory strategies being the least frequently utilized. Moreover, higher proficiency level correlated with increased usage of language learning strategies.

Methodology

Participants

As per Dornyei's recommendation (2007), a sample size of at least 100 participants is typically considered appropriate. However, in the present research study, the sample size could not reach this expected number due to constraints arising from the limited number of logistics management students who enrolled in the English for Logistics Business course. Consequently, a purposeful selection process was employed, resulting in 79 Thai EFL students being purposively chosen. These participants comprise senior Thai university students specializing in logistics management and pursuing English for logistics business as an elective course.

Instrument

The questionnaire utilized in this study was designed in both English and Thai languages, with the primary objective of investigating the participants' attitudes towards English language learning strategies. The questionnaire consisted of 42 closed-ended items, including memory strategies (items 1-8), cognitive strategies (items 9-17), compensation strategies (items 18-22), metacognitive strategies (items 23-31), affective strategies (items 32-37), social strategies (items 38-41), and cultural knowledge (item 42). These items aimed to measure the participants' perceptions of their English language learning strategies.

Each participant was requested to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the presented statements using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale enabled the participants to express their preferred rating for each strategy they employed.

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed using the Microsoft Excel Program, yielding a value of 0.90. This coefficient value indicates that the questionnaire employed in this research demonstrates an acceptable level of reliability, thereby enhancing the validity and credibility of the collected data.

Data collection

1) Prior to the commencement of data collection, the research proposal underwent the official approval process by an institutional review board (IRB). Upon receiving IRB approval, all participants were provided with comprehensive information about the study's purpose and procedures, and their voluntary participation was contingent upon obtaining informed consent. The consent process was administered verbally, and participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. Moreover, strict confidentiality measures were implemented to safeguard all collected data, ensuring its utilization solely for the advancement of the research objectives.

2) The questionnaire distribution was facilitated through the use of Google Forms, chosen for its convenience, which allowed participants to complete the questionnaire at their convenience, according to their own schedules. Participants were allocated a period of seven consecutive working days to furnish responses to the questionnaire.

Data analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaires underwent a descriptive analysis utilizing the Microsoft Excel Program. This analytical approach aimed to determine essential statistical parameters such as frequency, mean values, and standard deviation.

Results

The strategies most employed are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The most frequently used strategies

No.	Strategy	Mean	S.D.	Level
1	I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English. (M1)	4.05	0.90	High
2	I pay attention when someone is speaking English (Mc2)	3.88	0.90	High
3	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign (M2)	3.81	0.93	High
4	When I can't think of word during a conversation in English, I use gestures (Cp2)	3.81	1.11	High
5	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English (Cp1)	3.79	1.21	High
6	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English (Mc2)	3.78	1.02	High
7	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing (Cp2)	3.78	1.04	High
8	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake (A2)	3.75	1.05	High
9	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used (M2)	3.74	1.01	High
10	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English (A3)	3.74	1.21	High

Table 1 presents the findings of the analysis, unveiling the top-ten language learning strategies highly employed by Thai logistics management students. The highly used strategies, along with their respective mean values (Mean) and standard deviations (S.D.), are that thinking of relationships between their background knowledge and new learning things in English (Mean = 4.05, S.D. = 0.90), followed by paying attention when someone is speaking English (Mean = 3.88, S.D. = 0.90), remembering new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign (Mean = 3.81, S.D. = 0.93), using gestures (Mean = 3.81, S.D. = 1.11), looking for words in their own language that are similar to new words in English (Mean = 3.79, S.D. = 1.21), trying to find out how to be a better learner of English (Mean = 3.78, S.D. = 1.02), using a word or phrase that means the same thing (Mean = 3.78, S.D. = 1.04), encouraging themselves to speak English fearing of making a mistake (Mean = 3.75, S.D. = 1.05), remembering a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used (Mean = 3.74, S.D. = 1.01), and noticing their concern

when studying or using English (Mean = 3.74, S.D. = 1.21). These findings illuminate the language learning strategies predominantly employed by Thai logistics management students, offering valuable insights into their language learning practices.

Discussion

The ten most frequently used strategies

Regarding the top-ten most frequently used language learning strategies, the participants demonstrated utilization of both direct strategies and indirect strategies.

Among the direct strategies, memory strategies (M1 and M2) and compensation (Cp1 and Cp2) were notably prominent. In the context of M1, the students engaged in mental associations between their existing knowledge and the new lessons encountered. The elaboration process could be simple or intricate, provided that it held personal significance for the learners. Alternatively, M2 involved the use of mental imagery and auditory cues to enhance comprehension. In this strategy, learners linked new language information to pre-existing conceptual knowledge through meaningful imagination, either mentally or through visual representations. On the other hand, Cp1 entailed the learners' reliance on their native language to infer the meanings of new English words. Cp2 involved the participants' efforts to overcome limitations in speaking and writing. In this case, learners adjusted, approximated, or modified their messages by simplifying language, omitting certain elements of information, or expressing concepts with slight deviations from their intended meaning.

Additionally, among the indirect strategies, metacognitive strategies Mc2 and affective strategies A2 and A3 emerged as salient choices. In Mc2, learners actively organized and planned their learning approach, endeavoring to become more effective learners while also paying attention to English speakers. In A2, learners motivated themselves to fearlessly use English, encouraging self-confidence in language use. A3 involved the learners' introspection on their emotional state, specifically their feelings of nervousness while studying or using English.

To summarize, the participants' reported usage of both direct and indirect strategies, with three strategies each falling under memory strategies and compensation strategies, while two strategies each classified under metacognitive strategies and affective strategies. The findings suggest a preference for employing direct strategies over indirect strategies among the participants.

Direct strategies

1) Memory strategies

The highest-ranked strategies employed by the participants in this study were memory strategies, encompassing techniques that facilitate memorization without necessitating an in-depth understanding of the lesson. This strategy aids learners in storing and recalling learned information. The findings are consistent with the study by Najim & Kareem (2021), which highlighted the impact of memory strategies on EFL grammar learning. The Thai university in this study demonstrated a propensity for utilizing memory strategies, possibly influenced by their teachers' encouragement to memorize and repeat texts as a means of showcasing their comprehension. Additionally, the teaching methods employed by their instructors may have necessitated the use of memory strategies for retaining grammar structures and vocabulary.

However, it is important to acknowledge that previous studies have shed light on contrasting perspectives regarding the utilization of memory strategies. Firstly, the results of several investigations pertaining to language learning strategies revealed that learners

employed memory strategies the least or less frequently compared to other strategies when encountering challenges or difficulties in learning or using English as a foreign or second language (Alrashidi, 2022; Sukying, 2021; Al-sohbani, 2018; Kunasaraphan, 2015; Zhang, 2015; Zarei & Baharestani, 2014; Salahshour et al., 2013; and Bonyadi et al., 2012). Additionally, it has been observed that unsuccessful learners tend to rely on memory strategies more extensively (Wael et al., 2018). Furthermore, novice learners exhibit a high level of reliance on memory strategies, while elementary and pre-intermediate learners employ this strategy to a moderate extent. This observation may be attributed to the natural progression of language learning, as participants advance through the language acquisition process, and gradually shift their emphasis towards employing other strategies, thus reducing the reliance on memory strategies (Mora, et al., 2018; and Gavriilidou & Psaltou-Joycey, 2009).

2) Compensation strategies

This study observed that compensation strategies ranked fourth, fifth, and seventh among the most highly employed strategies by the participants. These findings align with previous research by Qingquan et al. (2008), Gharbavi & Mousavi (2012), Pasalic (2013) and Bessai (2018). Notably, compensation strategies are commonly utilized during speaking tasks. This strategic approach aids learners in extending their communication despite inaccuracies in language usage or limitations in vocabulary when expressing ideas or information in the target language during specific communicative interactions.

Indirect strategies

1) Metacognitive strategies

The participants reported metacognitive strategies as the second most highly used, among the identified language learning strategies. Metacognitive strategies encompass techniques that aid learners in organizing and evaluating their learning process, such as task organization, learning evaluation, and focused concentration on learning tasks (Alrashidi, 2022). The prevalent usage of metacognitive strategies by Thai students may be attributed to the exam-oriented nature of the Thai educational system. As students aspire to excel in their examinations, they are indirectly motivated to engage in organizing, monitoring, and planning their learning process to enhance their English proficiency (Alrashidi, 2022; Bessai, 2018). The notable prevalence of metacognitive strategy use in the present study is in the same lined with previous studies conducted by Alrashidi (2022), Phusum (2019), Bessai (2018) Khumhom (2018), Nguyen (2016), Rardprakhon et al. (2016), Saengaroon (2016), Hungyo (2015), Iamla-ong (2014), Gharbavi & Mousavi (2012). However, some studies have revealed that learners with lower language proficiency tend to employ metacognitive strategies more frequently than other strategies (Khumhom, 2018).

2) Affective strategies

Affective strategies were reported as the eighth and tenth most utilized strategies, despite demonstrating a high level of implementation. These strategies aid learners in using English even in situations where they may feel apprehensive. Additionally, affective strategies facilitate learners in recognizing or sensing moments of excitement when using English, prompting them to adopt a more cautious and attentive approach to learning or using the language. The findings of this study, which indicate a high level of implementation of affective strategies, align with previous research conducted by Kotarpuh et al. (2012) and Sukying (2021).

Comparing the results of the present study with those who studies in the same and different disciplines

1) When comparing students who majored in business, there is no noticeable difference, as they extensively used metacognitive strategies (Hungyo, 2013), compensation

strategies (Pasalic, 2013), affective strategies (Mandasari & Oktaviani, 2018; and Kotarpath et al., 2012) as the same extent.

2) When comparing with engineering students, there is likewise no difference, given their significant utilization of metacognitive strategies (Phusum, 2019; and Kardprakhon, 2016).

3) Similarly, in comparison with individuals majoring in English, there is no discernible difference, as they extensively employed metacognitive strategies (Chuin & Kaur, 2015; and Al-Buainain, 2010).

Conclusion and implications

This study explored language learning strategies among Thai EFL learners at the tertiary level. The research employed a questionnaire adapted from Oxford's Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL). The participants comprised 79 Thai EFL senior university students majoring in logistics management. The study's findings indicated that memory strategies were the most employed, followed by metacognitive, compensation, and affective strategies, respectively. The finding also revealed that in comparison to learners from other fields of study, there is no noticeable difference in the strategies employed.

In addition, the findings of this research hold significant implications for classroom instruction and the design of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. Teachers are advised to provide diverse language learning strategies that best suit their students, while learners should actively apply strategies that foster and enhance their learning experience. In the context of course design, developers can adapt and incorporate identified learning strategies into newly designed courses, particularly those pertaining to English for specific purposes.

For future studies, it is recommended to combine the quantitative findings from questionnaires with qualitative approaches such as interviews or classroom observations. By doing so, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of language learning strategies used by highly proficient students and assess their applicability within the specific contexts of their own students. This integration of quantitative and qualitative data can enrich future research and contribute to the refinement of language learning pedagogy.

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