

The Effects of Language Learning Strategies on the Students' Learning Achievement

Hao Yuan Cheng*¹, Nai-Ying Chang*²

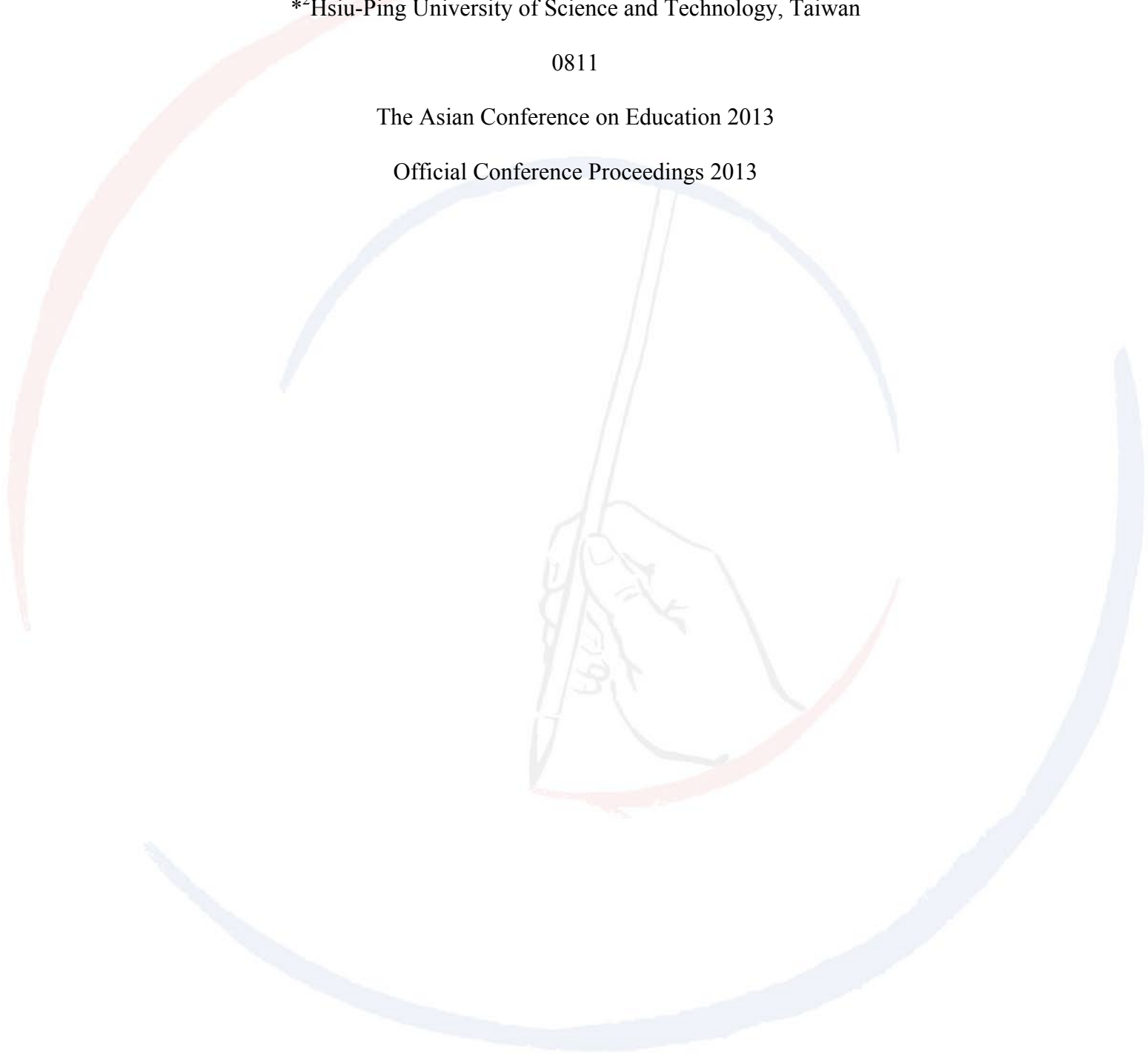
*¹Tzu-Chi College of Technology, Taiwan,

*²Hsiu-Ping University of Science and Technology, Taiwan

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Introduction

It is important to recognize the effectiveness of language learning strategies on the language learners' achievement. In the EFL learning situation, students relies memorization strategy for learning vocabulary, phrases and grammatical rules (Wu, 2010). However, it could be hard for language learners to apply their knowledge to proper settings in terms of the usage and the common expression of the language. Furthermore, it is challenging for language learners to acquire a language merely based on grammatical relative memorization strategies. Wu (2010) pointed out that communicative approach has become the most favorable English teaching and learning. This strategy creates the needs of communication in the learners' target language and communicative teaching style has been adopted to facilitate the class discussion. The foci of the communicative approach are grammar, discourses, function, sociolinguistic characteristics, and strategies. This approach is to develop the students the skills to cope with the communication for general purposes. One of the important benefits of applying the communicative teaching style is that the learners will be given opportunities to recognize their own learning process through the development of self-favored autonomous learning strategies.

Successful language learners have been reportedly adopting certain strategies to help themselves overcome with their problems in their learning process (Zhou, 2010). There is a positive connection between the learners with higher proficiency and the use of their learning strategies. Yang and Dai (2011) have pointed out that learning strategies can also be heavily influenced by culture and education. The curriculum implementation has developed Asian students certain efficient methods to cope with a great deal of information in order to pass the exams. Asian students perceive that vocabulary learning is the most unmanageable component in learning a language. According to Yang & Dai, memorization strategy is considered the most frequent strategy applied to language learning. For most Chinese students, learning English means memorizing a vast number of words.

Moreover, there are more strategies focus specific tasks. These strategies rely on the learners' use of their cognition. This process of mental capacity breakthrough emphasizes the learners' ability to organize the information and involves the learners' perception (Asgari & Mustapha, 2011). The strategies focus learners' planning and monitoring their process related to meta-cognitive strategies. According to Abed, the majority of higher achievement students applied more meta-cognitive strategies (2011). There are other strategies related to language learning. Based on Oxford (2001) classification with the purposes of developing the learners' communicative

competence, there are categorized as cognitive, meta-cognitive, memory-related, compensatory, affective and social strategies.

Learning strategies are tools for learners to develop their learning patterns and to facilitate their learning with the reflection of their behavior and thoughts (Abed, 2011). Learners who are aware of their favored learning patterns could be easier to cope with their learning tasks.

The main investigation of this study aims to answer two questions.

1. Is there any significant different between the students who are aware of learning strategies and utilizing them with those who do not use any strategy and are not aware of learning strategy?
2. What are their favorite learning strategies?

Literature review

For some researchers, language learning strategies were used to facilitate their communicative competence. The second language learning strategies that were structured by Oxford (2001) meant to develop for communicative purposes. There are 2 main sessions under her framework; direct and indirect. There are 6 categories lies underneath these two sessions.

Cognitive strategy refers to the learners' mental process for accomplish certain goal for performing specific tasks. Metacognitive strategies mean knowing how about thinking. It refers to the learners have the ability to examine their brain process in learning. Memory related strategies are about learners establishing their mental linkage which link all the information through images, sound, words or numbers. Compensatory strategy indicates that learners know what they already knew and utilize their acquired knowledge to fill in the gap of unknown information by guessing the clues from the context. Affective strategies refer to learners managing their emotion during the stages of learning. Social strategies are learners' relationship with their peers and their collaboration in learning (Abed, 2011).

Methodology

The participants in this study were all non-English major freshmen sampled from the general English course implemented by general education center at Tzu Chi college of technology. There are three levels of general English courses; beginning, intermediate, and advanced. These freshmen students took a pretest prior to their first lesson. The pretest and posttest were the basic level of General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) mocking test designed by ETS. The participants were also taking a posttest in the end

of semester in order to assess whether their general English proficiency has improved. The samples are extracted from the beginning level students. The language learning beginners are considered having higher learning anxiety than the learners with higher language proficiency (Wu, 2010). Therefore, the students with lower achievement with the use of their learning strategies were the core investigation in this study.

The population of this study consisted of 34 students. The instrument for data collection was using Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). There are five numbers of options in this questionnaire. The corresponding numbers from one to five are strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. The students were being tested prior to the course started and a posttest was also given to the students at the end of semester. The result of the participants' pretest and posttest and their scores of the SILL questionnaire were being compared and discussed.

There was a pretest given to the participants before the investigation. The test is a GEPT (General Education Proficiency Test) beginning level mocking test for listening and reading comprehension. It has totally 120 points for each section. The scores were converted to 10 percentages due to the grades of the test accounted for 10 percent of their midterm exam. The posttest was also using the GEPT beginning level mocking test with different questions. The scores were converted to 10 percentages due to the test accounted for 10 percent of the participants' final exam. The mean score for the pretest score was 3.08 and the mean score for the posttest score was 3.36. However, there was not a significant difference found from the analysis of variance. The students' pretest and posttest did not indicate a significant progress. Despite the insignificant difference, the participants' favor learning strategies still could be analyzed and discussed.

Oxford (1990) has suggested a criterion for measuring the frequency of the learning strategies being used. Since the scale in this survey is from 1 to 5; strongly agree to strong disagree. Therefore, a mean of 1.0-2.4 indicates high level of strategy use, a mean score of 2.5-3.4 for medium use of the strategy, mean of 3.5-5.0 for low frequency use of the strategy. The highest frequency used strategy was the question 25 in the compensatory section "when I can't think of a word during a conversation in the SL, I use gestures". There are other higher frequency responses scored below 3.4 mostly in memory related, cognitive strategy and meta-cognitive section. This finding corresponded with Oxford's studies in which the language learners usually adopt compensatory strategies (1990). Moreover, learning strategies portraying the process

of learners coping with their learning, based on the mean scores in the questionnaire, showing the participants in this investigation favored cognitive strategies. According to the studies of learning strategies corresponded to learners' anxiety and learning efficacy, learning strategies could be cultural and the learners could be influenced by their traditional value on the effectiveness of learning styles (Abed, 2011; Bonyadi, Nikou & shahbaz, 2012; Wu, 2010).

The mean score for the participants' overall use of the learning strategies is 3.1. This number indicates the medium frequency of the application of certain strategies among the participants. From descriptive statistic analysis, those participants who scored averagely below 3.4, have higher mean scores in the posttest than those low frequency learning strategies users.

Conclusion

The results of this study revealed that most low English proficiency learners favored memory related strategies. Although a small number of participants in this study resulted in the challenge of reaching the significant p-value in the t-test analysis, we could still observe the mean scores of those who scored higher in the posttest favoring memory, compensatory and cognitive strategies. This finding consistent with several studies related learners' strategies and their achievement (Abed, 2011; Bonyadi, Nikou & shahbaz, 2012; Dai, 2011; Ghonsooly & Longhmani, 2012; Zhou, 2010). From the data of the questionnaire, it seems that most EFL students prefer direct learning strategies as opposed to the studies of Iranian students' favored learning strategies which are mainly indirect. These pieces of empirical and literature evidence indicates that learning strategies are influenced by culture and the students' language proficiency is strongly correlated with their use of learning strategies. Furthermore, the students' proficiency level is related to not only repetitive practice but only their ability to link information together and filling the gap of unknown by analyzing the context. Further study could focus learners' anxiety and their strategies in coping with reading or vocabulary learning. In addition, the investigation of the social interaction and the benefits of incorporating those strategies into teaching methods could bring the inspiration to EFL teachers and learners.

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