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Language Learning Strategy Use and English Proficiency of below Average Indian ESL Students

Madhumathi, P.[1]*, Ramani, N.[2] and Prema, M.[3]

[1]*Research Associate, School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Vellore-14, Tamilnadu, India. Email: madhuhoney87@gmail.com. Mob: 91-9943401929*
[2]*Senior Professor of English, School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Vellore-14, Tamilnadu, India.*
[3]*Director, Survey Research Centre, VIT University, Vellore-14, Tamilnadu, India.*

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between the use of language learning strategy and English proficiency of below average Indian ESL students who registered for a summer course in 2012 at a private university in South India. Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and an institutional version of Test of English for Foreign Languages (TOEFL) were administered to under-achievers of an engineering course who registered for a summer course out of willingness to enhance their academic performance. Results from SILL showed that these below average students' total average use of strategies fell under medium level. Moreover, the study also concentrated on the difference in strategy use across gender and Board of Studies at school. The TOEFL scores revealed that this sample of under-achievers had low proficiency levels in English. The study found a linear relationship between the low proficiency students and their overall strategy use. This indicated that the most frequent users of language learning strategy among the under achievers scored comparatively higher scores in TOEFL. In addition, the study revealed that the least use of metacognitive and cognitive strategies was the reason for these students becoming unsuccessful learners. Thus, the study concluded that explicit training in language learning strategy use with due consideration to gender and Board of Studies, might increase the English proficiency and academic performance of these below average Indian students.

Keywords: academic reading, Board of Studies, EAP, Language proficiency, LLS, SILL

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E-mail addresses:
madhuhoney87@gmail.com (Madhumathi, P.),
ramani.n@vit.ac.in (Ramani, N.), premam@vit.ac.in (Prema, M.)
* Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

Research across the world has monitored the factors that develop language proficiency of

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second language learners. Amongst them Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), a tool designed by Oxford (1990) is recognized as comprehensive and is a widely used instrument to assess the strategy use of second language learners (Bremner, 1998; Green & Oxford, 1995). Research based on SILL reported positive correlation between language learning strategy (LLS) and language proficiency (Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Wharton, 2000). In addition, the studies emphasised that successful language learners used language-learning strategies more frequently than less successful learners do. The consensus of this paper is that the less proficient language learners use fewer language learning strategies and are less successful academic learners. For the purposes of the study, the term 'low academic' is used to represent the students with poor academic performance. These 'low academic' students are also defined as low to moderate proficiency students because of their below average score in TOEFL. These students had a below average TOEFL score of 281to 361 as against an average Indian TOEFL score of 519, as mentioned in ETS (1997).

The overall findings of the study signified that the strategy preference and their level of strategy use decided the success of the language learners. Therefore, the study concluded that explicit training in language learning strategy use might increase the English proficiency and academic performance of these below average students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Language learning strategies are defined as "the specific actions consciously employed by the learners for the purpose of learning language" (Griffiths, 2003, p.216). This definition evolved as a combination of Cohen's (1998) aspect of conscious selection, and Oxford's (1990) concept of language learning strategies as specific actions applied to learn a language. Rigney (1978) defines learning strategies as procedures that assisted language acquisition, retention, retrieval and performance. Oxford obtained Rigney's definition and further elaborated on language learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990, p.214). Anderson (2005) defines strategies as the conscious actions that readers take to improve their language learning. Oxford divided language learning strategies into six categories such as memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. Cohen (1998) emphasized an additional dimension to language learning strategies such as consciousness. Cohen argued that learners who employed language learning strategies ought to have been aware of the conscious choice of strategy they applied during language learning. Hence, he defined "the element of consciousness is what that distinguishes *strategies* from those processes that are not strategic" (Cohen, 1998, p.4).The learners have to learn the techniques of applying the language learning strategies; therefore,

they can consciously choose appropriate strategies for language learning.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) discussed that it was the teacher's responsibility to train the students in strategy use. Moreover, the cognitive view of learning explained that language learning strategies were teachable. Oxford and Nyikos (1989) stated that the concept of teachability of language learning strategies was universally accepted. Therefore, it is the teachers' responsibility to incorporate language learning strategies as an essential element of language teaching Curriculum.

Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) stated that frequent use of strategy increased the second language performance of the students. Rubin (1987) aimed at improving the performance of less successful students by teaching them the strategies that were mostly used by successful learners. He argued that the implementation of these strategies also depended on other variables such as language proficiency, age, situation, cultural differences and learning style. Stern (1975) added to Rubin's ideas by stating that the good language learner used positive learning strategies. O'Malley (1985) identified that ESL students with various levels of proficiency responded using an extensive variety of language learning strategies while the higher level students responded using metacognitive strategies most frequently. This enabled the researcher to conclude that greater use of metacognitive strategy increased the academic success of the students. Ehrman and Oxford (1995) discovered cognitive strategy use also played a vital role in enhancing the success of the students. Green and Oxford (1995) explained that high-level students used all kinds of language learning strategies more frequently when compared to lower level students.

A few studies had concentrated on low proficiency students' use of language learning strategy (Griffiths, 2003). Observations on the unsuccessful language learner strategy use were required to understand the reasons behind the low performance of these students, and perhaps to identify what strategies they avoided. A study conducted by Vann and Abraham (1990) with two unsuccessful learners suggested that the students were active strategy users, but failed to use suitable strategies. Porte (1998) conducted a study for 15 under-achieving learners at a private language school in London. He discussed that the majority of the unsuccessful learners used strategies that were similar to the strategies they employed in the first language that they acquired at schools in their native countries. Issues related to the difference in strategy use by successful and unsuccessful language learners need to be addressed in a more unified manner (Griffiths, 2003). Thus, the existing literature on unsuccessful learners is not adequate, and further research is needed to understand the difficulties faced by the learners while learning.The current study assumes that the background variables such as gender, language proficiency and Board of Studies might influence the learning achievement of the students. Oxford and Nyikos (1989) discovered that gender

difference significantly influenced the use of language learning strategies among undergraduate students. They reported that females tend to use more conscious language learning strategies than males. After that finding, most of the research studies conducted on gender revealed that females use language learning strategies more frequently than male (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford, 1993; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). This research also argued that difference in strategy use by gender depended on the context and socio-cultural situations of the participants. Socio-cultural factors seemed to influence the use and preferences of language learning strategies (Bedell & Oxford, 1996; Grainger, 1997; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Reid, 1987; Wharton, 2000).

Sheorey (1999) conducted a study on the use of language learning strategies by Indian undergraduate students studying their first year in Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Commerce. The study reported that Indian ESL students' use of language learning strategies ranged from high to moderate frequency on a five-point scale. In this study, the researcher had traced the impact of the factors such as gender, culture, and educational background on language learning strategies. In general, the results were consistent with other research conducted on similar environments. Female students used strategies more frequently than male students did. Students who studied in English medium schools used more language learning strategies than those from regional medium students did. The study did not incorporate the concept of Board of Studies the students studied at school. Thus, the current study had incorporated Board of Studies at school as one of the significant elements that might influence the language learning strategy use. In India, the school education system consists of different Board of Studies such as State Board (SB) of studies and Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), These Board of Studies follow different curriculum, teaching pedagogy, evaluation and syllabus materials. The students studying at different Board of Studies have different learning experiences. Therefore, the study assumes that the difference in Board of Studies at school might influence the students learning achievements.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research focused on the improvement of English language proficiency of below average Indian ESL students studying engineering courses at university level. Numerous studies predicted that increasing LLS use in turn increases Language proficiency and academic performance (Cummins, 1979; O'Malley *et al*., 1985; Oxford, 1990; Politzer, 1983; Anderson, 2005). Unlike other foreign universities, Indian universities have less awareness regarding the conduct of the standardized English for Academic purposes (EAP) course for improving the proficiency levels of students entering higher education (Sheorey, 2006). Therefore, this study aimed to identify the level of language learning strategy use of Indian low proficiency ESL

students. It also focused on the relationship that existed between language learning strategy use and ESL proficiency. It further investigated the differences in strategy use by gender and Board of Studies.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants of this study were 60 ESL students who registered for a summer course at a private university in South India. The summer courses provided additional coaching for below average students who wanted to improve their academic performance. Highly motivated students generally registered for summer courses (out of their willingness) to improve their academic performance. Thus, the population of the study was highly motivated Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech) students who wanted to improve their English language proficiency. These students were on the verge of completing their first year and about to enter their second year of study. All of the participants learned English to enhance their academic performance at higher education level.

The practice version of the TOEFL test was conducted to assess the English Language proficiency of these students. The highest TOEFL score obtained was 380 and the lowest was 266. The obtained TOEFL score showed that the students had beginner level proficiency in English. Thus, to identify the variation of proficiency level within the sample, the class was divided into three proficiency groups (high, medium, low). Based on the TOEFL total mean score (m=324), the sample was divided into 15 high, 27 medium and 18 low proficiency level students. The age of the students ranged from 18 to 21. There were 33 females and 27 males. These students were from various states in India with different language backgrounds. The sample constituted of 19 Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) students, and 41 State Board students. CBSE is a board of education under the control of the Union Government of India. The State Board of Education is under the control of State Governments. All the participants had previously received English instruction for at least 10 years in their schools.

INSTRUMENTS

The Strategy Inventory Language Learning (SILL version 7.0), which has 50 items to evaluate the language learning strategy use of the ESL/EFL students, was administered. It was a self-reporting questionnaire that was used to evaluate the frequency of exercising language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990). Research using SILL as a key instrument for assessing the range of use of language learning strategies reported the reliability coefficient of SILL as .85 to .98 (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Park, 1997; Sheorey, 1999; Wharton, 2000; Anderson, N.J, 2005). This assured SILL as a reliable and valid instrument to measure the use of language learning strategy. A Cronbach's alpha (reliability test) run through SPSS for the current research displayed an acceptable reliability (.74). SILL consists of items that are categorized into six strategy groups. Oxford (1995) explains

these six categories as memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. Memory strategies assist learners to remember information and retrieve it when required to communicate (e.g., using imagery, sounds or both to remember new words). Cognitive strategies engage construction and revision of internal mental models (e.g., reasoning, analyzing, and summarizing). Compensation strategy use helps the learner to overcome a lack of knowledge of the target language (using circumlocution). Metacognitive strategies aid learners to control their learning (e.g., monitoring errors). Affective strategies facilitate the learners to control emotions and attitudes related to language learning (e.g., reducing anxiety). Social strategies help the learners to communicate with others (e.g., cooperating with others, asking questions, and becoming culturally aware) (Wharton, 2000).

A practice version of the TOEFL was used to measure the proficiency level of the participants. TOEFL constitutes three sections of multiple-choice type questions. Section 1 tested the listening comprehension; Section 2 tested structure and written expression; Section 3 tested vocabulary and reading comprehension. The reliability and validity of the TOEFL scores are .95 (ETS, 1997)

A separate questionnaire was administered to obtain demographic information on the participants. The background details included gender, branch of study, year of study, age, native state, place of study (urban / rural), purpose for studying English language, and Board of Studies at school (STD XII).

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The researcher and the research supervisor administered a practice version of TOEFL and the SILL to the students. The tests were administered with respect to the standard guidelines associated with each of the instruments. The purpose of the study was explained both verbally and in writing to all the participants. The researcher stayed back with the respondents to explain any of the items in the questionnaire, if necessary. However not much of the help was sought by the respondents to understand the items in the questionnaire. The researcher explained to the participants the advantages of contributing to the research data. The participants were reminded that there was no right or wrong answers to SILL and the questionnaire. Finally, they were assured of the confidentiality of the responses.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the data was performed using the SPSS statistical programme. Descriptive statistical results were obtained for all six categories of language learning strategies, overall total language learning strategy, TOEFL scores, gender and Board of Studies. Paired sample t-tests were conducted to compare the significance differences between the six categories of language learning strategies. The one-way ANOVA was performed to identify the significant mean difference for all the variables. The Pearson-product Moment

correlation was performed to study the relationship among the six categories of language learning strategies, total language learning strategies and TOEFL scores.

RESULTS

Overall Strategy use

Results of the SILL administered to below average ESL students at the university level revealed a total average use of strategies at medium level (M = 2.81) (see Table 1). The participants mostly preferred to use two strategies: memory (M = 3.30) and affective strategies (M = 3.31). Next to these strategies the participants preferred social strategy (M = 2.83), compensation strategy (M = 2.63) and cognitive strategy (M = 2.55). The least preferred strategy by the below average ESL students was metacognitive strategy (M = 2.48). The paired t-test results exposed a statistically significant difference between strategies used by the participants. There was a statistically significant difference between the use of memory strategy and cognitive strategy (t = 10.31) (p = 0.00). (see Table 1). In the SILL level of overall strategy use, memory, affective, social, compensation and cognitive fell under the medium strategy use (mean value between 2.5 to 3.4). Only metacognitive strategy fell within the low strategy use (mean value below 2.4).

The individual item mean scores for the entire sample was analyzed based on the responses of the participants on the 50 items of SILL in a descending order from the most to least used. The results indicated that out of the 50 items, the mean score of 7 items fell in high strategy use, 29 items fell in medium strategy use, and 14 items fell in low strategy use. Items related to memory strategy such as 'I use flashcards to remember new English words' was most frequently used by the participants (M = 4.41). Conversely, the least used item (M = 1.81) was 'I watch English TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English' which belongs to cognitive strategy use.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics for the variables and Paired Sample t-Tests for mean difference between the six strategy Categories

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Difference	T
Memory	1.222	4.556	3.30741	.633965	Mem. > Cog.	10.31**
Cognitive	1.286	3.571	2.55952	.520783	Cog . < Com.	.89
Compensation	1.167	4.000	2.63056	.668846	Com. > Met.	1.25
Metacognitive	1.000	4.000	2.48148	.719113	Met. < Aff.	6.68**
Affective	1.333	5.000	3.31389	.826293	Aff. > Soc.	4.30**
Social	1.000	5.000	2.83611	.836712	Soc < Mem	4.18**
Total	1.62	3.56	2.8123	.45431		
TOEFL	261.00	380.00	324.2500	32.68319		

**Correlation is significant at .01 level (2 – tailed)

TABLE 2
Correlations among the Six Categories of Language Learning Strategies, Total Language Learning Strategies, and the TOEFL Scores

	A	B	C	D	E	F	Tot.	TOEFL
Mem. (A)	1							
Cog. (B)	.542**	1						
Com. (C)	.281*	.484**	1					
Met. (D)	.297*	.535**	.129	1				
Aff. (E)	.345**	.189	.292*	.269*	1			
Soc. (F)	.321*	.326*	.362**	.232	.465**	1		
Tot.	.706**	.808**	.583**	.664**	.597**	.638**	1	
TOEFL	.423**	.401**	.120	.325*	.207	.093	.414**	1

*Correlation is significant at .05 level (2-tailed)
**Correlation is significant at .01 level (2 – tailed)

Strategy use by English Proficiency Level

The major purpose of the research was to identify the relationship that existed between language learning strategy use and ESL proficiency. All six strategy categories correlated significantly with the total language learning strategy use (see Table 2). Memory and cognitive strategy significantly correlated with TOEFL score ($p<0.01$), Metacognitive strategy significantly correlated with the TOEFL score ($p<0.05$).

The results of the TOEFL indicated that the participants had low proficiency in English with an average TOEFL score of 324. The TOEFL score for the Indian students as mentioned in ETS (1997) represented an average of 519. Thus, the results revealed that the Indian ESL students participated in this study had below average English Language proficiency. Therefore, based on the average score secured in the TOEFL, the participants within the group were divided into three sub-groups such as high, medium and low proficiency (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
Strategy and the TOEFL Mean Scores of the Three Strategy Sub-Groups

	Strategy Groups		
Variables	Low (n=18)	Medium (n = 27)	High (n=15)
Strategy Mean	2.57	2.78	3.11
TOEFL Mean	281	324	361

The total mean value of the low proficiency students was 2.57 and the average score secured by these students in TOEFL was 281. The total average value of the medium proficiency students was 2.78 and the mean scores earned by these students in TOEFL was 324. The total mean value of the high proficiency students was 3.11 and the average scores earned by these students in TOEFL were 361. It was identified that as the use of strategies increased, the TOEFL score of the individual increased. These results indicated that there was a linear relationship between the use of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and English proficiency of the students.

Medium proficiency students within the group least preferred using metacognitive

(M = 2.49) and compensation strategies (M = 2.50) (see Table 4). However, the other two groups, low and high proficiency, used metacognitive (M = 2.20, M= 2.79) and cognitive the least (M = 2.28, M= 2.83) respectively. The low proficiency students mostly preferred using affective strategies (M = 3.16). The total strategy use (F= 7.56, p = .001) indicated that there was a significant difference in the use of strategies among the sub-groups of low, medium and high proficiency. Among these subgroups, the high proficiency students used strategies more frequently than the low and medium proficiency students did.

Strategy Use by Gender

The overall mean value difference of male (M = 2.75) and female (M = 2.86) indicated that the females engaged in strategy use more frequently than males. However, statistically there was no significant difference. A statistically significant difference in the use of metacognitive strategy was found between males and females (F = 3.77, p= 0.05), with females using metacognitive strategies more frequently than males. Females also preferred the use of social strategies (M= 2.92) than males (M = 2.72). Males most frequently used memory strategies (M = 3.29), and least preferred the use of metacognitive strategies (M = 2.30). Similarly, female participants responded using affective strategies (3.35) the most, and compensation strategies the least (M = 2.60). While comparing the TOEFL scores, female students scored (M= 326) higher than male students (M = 321).

Strategy use and Board of Studies

The sample constituted around 68% of students from the State Board and 32% of students from Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). Although the difference in the overall strategy use of State Board and CBSE was not statistically significant, there was a significant difference in the use of metacognitive strategies found between

TABLE 4
Descriptive statistics for the variables and F-Test for mean difference between sub-groups of English Proficiency

Variable	Low		Medium		High		F	Sig	Diff.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Mem	2.93	.70	3.32	.54	3.71	.43	7.44	.001**	Low, Mid < High
Cog	2.28	.62	2.58	.46	2.83	.29	5.36	.007**	
Com	2.56	.72	2.50	.64	2.94	.57	2.35	.104	
Met	2.20	.64	2.49	.77	2.79	.59	2.93	.061	
Aff	3.16	.73	3.23	.92	3.63	.69	1.56	.219	
Soc	2.71	.93	2.73	.71	3.16	.88	1.59	.212	
Tot	2.57	.51	2.78	.38	3.13	.30	7.56	.001**	
TOEFL	281.1		324.2		361.6				

** p = 0.01

TABLE 5
Descriptive statistics for the variables and F-Test for mean difference between gender

Variable	Female		Male		F	Sig	Diff.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Mem	3.31	.56	3.29	.72	.02	.86	F > M
Cog	2.59	.42	2.52	.62	.26	.61	
Com	2.60	.74	2.66	.57	.14	.70	
Met	2.62	.56	2.30	.84	3.77	.05*	
Aff	3.35	.83	3.25	.83	.21	.64	
Soc	2.92	.83	2.72	.83	.91	.34	
Tot	2.86	.39	2.75	.51	0.89	0.34	
TOEFL	326.5		321.2				

*p = 0.05

CBSE and State Board (F= 4.07, p= 0.05), with CBSE students engaged in a high use of metacognitive strategy (See Table 6). The mean value indicated State Board students used social strategies (M = 2.91) more frequently than CBSE students (M = 2.67). Mean differences indicated that CBSE students (M = 2.84) employed strategy use more frequently than State Board student (M = 2.79).

DISCUSSION

Overall Strategy use

When the 60 Indian below average engineering students were considered as one group, these second language learners responded using memory and affective strategies more frequently than the other strategies during their academic learning. Politzer and MaGroarty (1985) identified strong use of memory strategies by ESL students in the context of rote-memorization. In addition, Indian school education follows a traditional language learning method, which prioritizes memorization (Sheorey, 1999). Most of the studies on Asian students' language learning reported high use of memory strategies (Bremner, 1998; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985; Wharton,2000; Yang, 1999) This current study also proved the same fact of high usage of memory strategies by Indian below average ESL students. Indian students studying at schools believe that they can score pass marks in the examination, only if they reproduce the answers as exactly as written in the textbooks. Thus, the students' memoriese word-by word from the textbooks with or without understanding the meaning of the text. Therefore, to remember the text exactly, naturally these students practice various memory strategies from school level onwards, which they tend to continue even during higher education. As these students chosen for the study were poor academic achievers, they believed that their forgetfulness resulted in their low academic scores. Therefore, to score well in the exams these students also believed

TABLE 6
Descriptive statistics for the variables and F-Test for mean difference between Boards of Studies.

Variable	CBSE		State Board		F	Sig	Diff.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Mem	3.28	.59	3.31	.65	.03	.86	CBSE > SB
Cog	2.64	.39	2.52	.56	.70	.40	
Com	2.60	.58	2.64	.71	.03	.84	
Met	2.67	.79	2.29	.67	4.07	.05*	
Aff	3.27	.92	3.33	.78	.07	.79	
Soc	2.67	.77	2.91	.86	1.02	.31	
Tot	2.84	.46	2.79	.45	.10	.75	
TOEFL	335.1		319				

*p = 0.05

in memorizing word by word from the text through employing memory strategies while learning. This can be supported by observing the highly preferred item by the students: 'I use flashcards to remember new English words' with mean value 4.41. Next to this item, they preferred using rhymes to remember new English words (M=3.90). Thus, the most preferred memory strategies by the below average students indicated that most of the students had fear of forgetfulness.

The more frequent use of affective strategies by the students was quite natural. As these students have low proficiency in English, naturally they used affective strategies to deal with their apprehension in language learning. Oxford (1990) classified affective strategies as indirect strategies used for regulating emotions. Even though the students were under-achievers, they joined the summer course with a strong motivation to improve their academic performance. Therefore, to overcome their feelings against the language learning and to perform well in higher education, the students practiced affective strategies more frequently.

The least preferred strategy by the students was cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Both cognitive and metacognitive strategies had significantly influenced the ESL students academic learning (Tang & Moore, 1992). Pintrich and Garcia (1994) explained that metacognitive knowledge and an increase in academic performance went hand in hand. As the students were under-achievers, they used metacognitive strategies the least. O'Malley *et al*. (1985) concluded that students who were more successful in studies were capable of applying greater metacognitive control over their learning. The disuse of metacognitive strategies by the respondents indicated that they had less knowledge in language learning (Wenden, 1999). It clearly indicated that the students were unsuccessful in managing their learning process.

Cognitive strategies involved learners' mental processes in understanding and

acquiring knowledge about language (Oxford, 1990). Tang and Moore (1992) on language learning concluded that cognitive strategies improved comprehension ability among the successful learners (Ehrman and Oxford, 1995). Thus, the below average ESL students' less use of cognitive strategies explained their inadequacy in comprehending the meaning of academic materials. Certainly, this inadequacy in cognitive strategies resulted in low English language proficiency of the participants. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) explained that cognitive skill is the most essential for developing language learning ability, which in turn would improve language learning strategies. Thus, improving the cognitive strategy use among low proficiency students might improve their overall strategy use of language learning.

Strategy use by English Proficiency Level

Most of the research examining relationships between language learning strategies and English proficiency reported a positive linear relationship between these two variables. The research showed that high proficiency students used language learning strategies more frequently than medium proficiency students. Similarly, medium proficiency students used language learning strategies more frequently than low proficiency students (Bermer, 1998; Oxford, 1995; Park, 1997; Sheorey, 1999; Wharton, 2000). The current study concentrated particularly on low proficiency ESL students, and reported a linear relationship between low language proficiency students and their language learning strategy use.

Further, the study was also interested in the detailed analysis of the low proficiency students' strategy use. Based on their TOEFL scores, the low proficiency group was categorized into three sub-groups such as high, medium, and low proficiency. Within the below average students group, the data revealed a linear relationship between the high proficiency group using strategies more frequently and receiving high TOEFL scores when compared with medium and low proficiency students. Medium proficiency students within the group preferred using metagonitive and compensation strategies the least. In contrast, the other two groups, low and high proficiency used metacognitive and cognitive the least.

Studies on language learning strategy use pointed out cognitive and metacognitive strategies as the predictor of second language (L2) proficiency (Oxford, 1990; OMalley and Chamot, 1990; Park, 1997; Tang and Moore, 1992). These findings stated that the importance of active mental engagement for manipulating and transforming learning materials employed cognitive strategies such as analysis, reasoning and elaborating on the text. Similarly, metacognitive strategies facilitated the learners to manage and monitor their learning processes. Thus, these two skills were essential for a learner to move from beginner to advanced levels of language learning. The findings of the study implied that the lack of cognitive and metacognitive strategy use among the students resulted in their low proficiency

scores. Thus, the students of the low proficiency groups must be trained in cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

The low proficiency sub-group students mostly preferred using affective strategy, which explained the emotional support that they required to face the reality of language learning. The results of sub-groups were again consistent with the existing research on participants with various proficiency levels. Overall, the results explained that the hierarchy of language learning strategies was applicable even within the sub-groups, which yielded statistically significant differences among them. Similar studies within particular levels of proficiency can be conducted to fine-tune the understanding regarding strategy use and language proficiency.

The correlation analysis through SPSS revealed that the total language learning strategy use significantly correlated with TOEFL scores ($p = 0.01$). Another finding of the study was that among the six categories of language learning strategies, memory, cognitive and metacognitive significantly correlated with TOEFL scores of the students. It indicated the strong relationship between memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategy use in enhancing TOEFL scores.

The significant relationship between language learning strategies and the TOEFL scores pointed out the importance of strategy use in L2 proficiency (Horwitz, 1987; Vann, 1987; Vann & Roberta, 1990). These results recommended that strategy training be executed in classrooms to facilitate students to become autonomous L2 learners outside the classroom where much of L2 learning occurs (Wenden, 1991). The effect of training students on strategy use within larger classrooms with different learner characteristics seemed to be less successful (O'Malley *et al*., 1990; Wenden, 1991). However, in the current study the students belong to a specific characteristic of the low proficiency group. Therefore, the possibility of teaching them as a class might be possible. Thus, we have to identify an effective method of training these students with language learning strategy use.

Strategy use by Gender

Many researches have shown that females tend to use more learning strategies than males (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford, 1993; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). The finding of the current study also reported the same. There was a significant difference in the use of metacognitive strategy by females. This indicated that females were monitoring their language learning progress more frequently than males. The result of the TOEFL scores also proved that females scored higher than males. In India, the number of females registering for higher education is comparatively lower than that of males. In the Indian culture, females are married at young age. After marriage, most females cannot continue their education. The Indian statistical report says that females graduation rates are less than the males' (Raman, 2006). Thus, the female students entering higher education seem to have a high responsibility to complete

their course successfully. Therefore, female students are conscious enough in monitoring their language learning progress. Thus, the motivation to finish the course successfully might have resulted in better strategy use and TOEFL scores of females.

Strategy use and Board of Studies

Several studies indicated socio cultural background as related to language strategy use (Bedell & Oxford, 1996; Grainger, 1997; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Reid, 1987; Wharton, 2000). Sheorey (1999) in his study on Indian ESL students did not focus on the influence of the Board of Studies on language learning strategies. The concept of studying in different Boards of Studies became popular after the study conducted by Sheorey (1999) on Indian ESL students. Thus, the present research focused on the aspects of students coming from schools with different Boards of Studies. The students in the study group belonged to CBSE and State Board. The results indicated that CBSE students used cognitive and metacognitive strategies more frequently than State Board students did. The results also reflected a higher use of social strategies by State Board students than CBSE students did. The syllabus, teaching process, and infrastructure for the CBSE are different from that of the State Board. There is a general opinion that CBSE syllabus is more challenging for students than the State Board syllabus (The Hindu, 2012). Thus, the students, in order to pass their exams, need to learn critical materials and exercise appropriate cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Further, most of the students from State Board schools are from rural backgrounds. Shift (1988) explained that rural environments tend to have a peaceful, friendly and cooperative nature so that societal relationships in rural areas tended to be more personal and closely bonded than urban social relationships. This might be the reason for State Board students' use of social strategy more frequently than CBSE students.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study identified that below average ESL students registered for the summer course were not aware of language learning strategies and their importance in acquiring language proficiency. Therefore, the unawareness of their language learning strategy use has to be rectified through explicit training in these language learning strategies. The correlation analysis reported that the participants had a linear relationship between SILL and TOEFL scores. This explained that when these low proficiency students were categorized into three groups based on their TOEFL scores, their correlation reported a linear relationship. This finding indicated that the strategy use increased the TOEFL score of the low proficiency students. A similarity existed between the sub-groups correlation results and other studies conducted for ESL students with all the three levels (low, medium, high) of proficiency. The low to medium level strategy users least preferred the metacognitive and cognitive strategies during language learning, which

indicated their lack of control over direction, organization, monitoring and planning in language learning. The correlation analysis results revealed that memory, metacognitive and cognitive strategy use might improve the language proficiency of these low proficient ESL students. Therefore, it is wise to start training the students with emphasis on skills related to metacognitive and cognitive strategies rather than on the other strategies.

As these students are under achievers in learning, the researcher interviewed the students to identify what kind of learning instruction would interest these students for learning Language Learning Strategies (LLS). Students came up with responses such as learning through fun activities, learning through materials that were not directly related to engineering subjects, learning through games and learning through group works. By observation, the learning choice of these below average students indicated that these students did not prefer a traditional method of learning. They preferred to learn language learning strategies through practical exercises with less of an emphasis on engineering subjects.

During practical sessions, the students could be divided into groups. The groups could be divided in such a manner that each of the groups constituted both male and female students who studied in State Board as well as in CBSE. Hence, the students from State Board schools would encourage socialising, and they would co-ordinate well within the group, which would result in positive communication within the group. Comparatively, female students applied monitoring skills more frequently than male students did. Therefore, when both male and female students are grouped together, female students would motivate the male students in understanding the responsibility of completing the assigned work within the specified time.

Most of the research on group learning reported that students working in groups provided motivation and facilitated students to reduce, apprehension and anxiety. It is emphasized that group work provides social and emotional support to the students, which results in active learning (Gerlach, 1994). Thus, the teachers in their practical sessions may give exercises in which the students can work in groups using language learning strategies. In addition, teachers can make use of language laboratories to train the students through games, which may help them with the skills related to language learning strategies. For example, to teach vocabulary items to students, the teacher can make use of the language laboratory to facilitate the students in working with puzzle games related to vocabulary acquisition. The above practice demands more mental process while learning the language, which might increase students' use of cognitive strategies.

Thus, the study concludes that unsuccessful learners need exclusive teaching and appropriate training in language learning strategies, which might enhance their learning achievements.

RECOMMONDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Similar to this study, further research can concentrate on populations with particular proficiency levels and their relationship with SILL. The intervening factors other than gender and Board of Studies can be included for analysis based on the need and socio cultural background of the selected population. In this study, we have used SILL to assess the language learning strategies of the ESL students; other studies can use other instruments to assess the language learning strategies. The researcher can choose particular skills among the communication skills such as reading, writing, and listening and find out the relationship particular skills have with language learning strategy use.

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