International Conference on Education and Educational Psychology (ICEEPSY 2012)

The Study of the Undergraduates’ English Learning Strategies

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Abstract

The purposes of this study aimed to study and compare the undergraduates’ English learning techniques and English learning strategies among four skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing in a high achievement group and a low achievement group in phase one and to study the results of using the English learning techniques in a low achievement group in phase two. The research instruments employed at each phase were the English learning techniques and strategies questionnaire, the semi-structured interview form, the behavioural observation form, the self-reflection form and task evaluation form. The findings revealed that the undergraduates in a high achievement group and a low achievement group used the different English learning techniques but the similar English learning strategies. The high achievement group, however, performed better in English skills than the low achievement group because of the duration of their practices and the concentration for academic purposes. Moreover, the results of using English learning techniques in the low achievement group demonstrated that the students had better English learning behaviours and obtained a very good level from task assessment.

1. Introduction

For the English language instruction as a foreign language in Thailand, it wasn’t successful as it should be. Although the students spent several years in school, they were not able to use the English language in listening, speaking, reading, and writing efficiently. Since the students lacked of opportunity in using the language in environment as the language owner did. The teachers selected and determined their instructional activities. But, they still didn’t provide various activities so that their students would have more opportunities in using language. Besides, the each student had different learning style. Ellis (1994) stated that there were three groups of related variables including: the Individual learner differences, the affective states, and other general factors. The variable groups in different strategies of students who studied the language, and the variable group of language learning outcomes regard to the proficiency, achievement, and rate of acquisition. According to current situation in instructional management, found that the students had different levels of their learning achievement. As a result, the researcher was interested in studying which strategy the high learning achievement students called “High Learning Achievement Students,” used, in order to conclude the high achievement student group’s English learning
techniques and strategies as well as apply them to develop the low achievement student group’s learning achievement to be congruent with the students’ learning strategies in the future.

1.1 Research Purposes
The purposes of this study were as the followings:
1. To study the English learning techniques, and English learning strategies of high achievement students, and low achievement students.
2. To compare the English learning techniques, and English learning strategies of high achievement students, and low achievement students.
3. To use the high achievement students’ English learning techniques to develop the low achievement students’ English learning.

2. Literature review
This study used the framework of Oxford’s (1990) classification of language learning strategies which consist of direct strategies, and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are divided into memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. Moreover, indirect strategies are divided into metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. For techniques, this work referred to Naiman et al.’s (1978 cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990) techniques for second language learning focused on specific aspects of language learning which comprise of sound acquisition, grammar, vocabulary, listening comprehension, learning to talk, learning to write, and learning to read. According to synthesis of research studies, the high learning achievement students, and the low learning achievement students had different learning strategies in English language (Hoomana and Boonin, 2007; Boonma, 2008). Moreover, the students with high learning achievement, significantly used more learning strategies than those with low level of learning achievement (Kanyot, 1997; Jindaprasert, 1997). In direct strategies, the students most frequently used the compensation in language learning (Wajasat, 1990; Yang, 1992; Panmuang, 2002; Boonkerd, 2003; Kotesombat, 2003; Taw, 2008; Yin, 2008; Yang, 2010), frequently used memory strategies (Panmuang, 2002; Prasobsin, 2003; Koh Thong Chiang, 2006; Siriwan, 2007; Prakongchat, 2007), and cognitive strategies (Panmuang, 2002; Koh Thong Chiang, 2006). For the indirect strategies, the students frequently used metacognitive strategies (Wajasat, 1990; Rattanapon, 1998; Panmuang, 2002; Koh Thong Chiang, 2006; Pawapachara-udom, 2007; Prakongchat, 2007), used social strategies (Panmuang, 2002; Koh Thong Chiang, 2006; Sritampa, 2006), and affective strategies (Panmuang, 2002; Prasobsin, 2003; Sritampa, 2006).

3. Methodology
3.1 Target Group
The target group consisted of 10 fourth year students majoring in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Bachelor’s Degree in Education, Faculty of Education, Khon Kaen University who enrolled ENG 321 English Grammar in academic year 2009, with grade point average 3.69 up for 5 students as the high learning achievement students, and the low learning achievement students with grade point average lower than 3.00.

3.2 Instruments
3.2.1 Phase 1: A study and a comparison of the target group’s English learning techniques, and English learning strategies.
The instruments using for studying and comparing the target group’s English learning techniques, and English learning strategies, included the Questionnaire, and Semi-structured interview.

3.2.2 Phase 2: The instruments using for studying the findings of the application in English learning for teaching the low achievement target group.
The instruments using for studying the findings of the application in English learning for teaching the low achievement target group, were 1) Lesson Plans, 2) Learning Behavioral Observation Form, 3) the Task Assessment Form, and 4) the Learning Reflection Form.

4. Results

4.1. The use of English learning techniques, and English learning strategies of high achievement students, and low achievement students in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Table 1
The overall level of practice in English learning techniques and strategies for practicing the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice Strategies</th>
<th>Practice Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( \bar{X} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening Skill</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking Skill</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Skill</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Skill</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 1, showed that the level of practice in English learning of both high achievement student group, and low achievement student group regarding to listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, in overall, was in “Moderate” level (\( \bar{X} = 3.33 \) and S.D. = 0.59). Considering each skill, found that the practice in listening skill, in overall, was in “High” level (\( \bar{X} = 3.51 \) and S.D. = 0.64). The practice strategy for speaking skill, in overall, was in “High” level (\( \bar{X} = 3.73 \) and S.D. = 0.87). The practice strategy for reading skill, in overall, was in “Moderate” level (\( \bar{X} = 3.19 \) and S.D. = 0.68). Moreover, the practice strategy for writing skill, in overall, was in “Moderate” level (\( \bar{X} = 3.23 \) and S.D. = 0.74). The skill with highest level of average value, was the usage of practice in speaking skill. The second order included the usage of practice in listening skill, and writing skill. The skill with lowest level of average value, was the usage of practice in reading skill. From the above mentioned, it could be concluded as follows:

Figure 1 The overall level of practice in English learning techniques and strategies for practicing the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.
4.2 The comparison of the English learning techniques, and English learning strategies of high achievement students, and low achievement students.

The English learning strategies of high achievement student group, and low achievement student group regarding to the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, could be concluded in Table 2.

**Table 2**
Comparison of similarities and differences of English learning techniques between the high achievement student group, and low achievement student group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Similarities in English Learning Techniques of High Achievement Group, and Low Achievement Group</th>
<th>Differences in English Learning Strategies of High Achievement Group, and Low Achievement Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High Group</td>
<td>Low Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Listening to media practicing one’s listening skill, foreign teachers teaching in class, radio programmes, English songs, and internet</td>
<td>- Listening to native speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Watching soundtrack movies, English programmes on TV, and cartoons</td>
<td>- Watching Korean Movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Listening to native speakers</td>
<td>Watching international football programmes on TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Watching international football programmes on TV</td>
<td>Lesson textbooks with audio tape including conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Speaking imitating the characters and remembering situation in stories for application.</td>
<td>Reading introduction and explanation from online games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Practicing in Speaking by oneself, Going abroad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Practicing in Speaking with oneself by determining the situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Video for Speaking.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Encyclopedia, short novels, articles, guessing meaning from context of sentence, translation from English into Thai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reading daily newspapers, short stories, magazines, English lyrics, English cartoon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- English subtitle, books, documents, textbooks, and studying in Class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Classroom writing, English Grammar Book, Writing sentences using English lyrics</td>
<td>Tutorial and Journal Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Pen friend Email, Translation from Thai into English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Talking through the program, Practice writing from whatever which thinks of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to interview data, found that in listening, both of high achievement students, and low achievement students, expended Cognitive strategies and Affective strategies. For speaking, found that the students administered the Cognitive strategies as well as Compensation strategies. In addition in reading and writing, found that the students showed their Memory strategies, Cognitive strategies, and Compensation strategies. All of the strategies mentioned were Direct strategies. In addition, the students also used Indirect strategies, Meta-cognitive strategies, Affective strategies, and Social strategies in pair work as well as group work in doing report and presentation.

Ranking order of Direct strategies, the students administered Cognitive strategies in every skill including: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, Compensation strategies in Speaking, Reading, and Writing, and Memory strategies in Reading and Writing. For Indirect strategies, the students expended Affective strategies in
every skill including: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, Social strategies in Speaking and Writing, and Meta-cognitive strategies in Speaking and Writing as shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Language learning strategies used by the target group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Direct strategies</th>
<th>Indirect strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect strategies</td>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 The techniques using in English language learning for teaching the low achievement target group.

The techniques using for developing the target group’s English language learning skills were as follows: song, movies, Cartoon strips, and Aesop’s fables. Considering scores obtaining from the assessment of worksheet in English language learning by song, found that the target group obtained the score in “Very Good” level. In English language learning by movies, found that their score was in “Good” level. For English language learning by cartoon strips, found that their score was in “Very Good” level. In English language learning by Aesop’s fables, found that their score was in “Very Good” level.

According to the application of English language learning for developing the target group’s English language learning, found that the target group mainly used Direct Strategies regarding to Cognitive strategies, and Compensation strategies in listening. For speaking, the target group mostly used the Indirect Strategies regarding to Metacognitive strategies, and Social Strategies. What’s more, the target group administered the Direct Strategies in Cognitive strategies and Social strategies. In reading, the target group not only used Direct strategies in Cognitive strategies and Compensation strategies but also Indirect strategies in Metacognitive strategies, and Social strategies.

5. Discussion

5.1 The findings and comparisons of English learning techniques and strategies of the target group

There were no differences in the used strategies between students with high achievement in language proficiency (Kotesombat, 2003; Koh Thong Chiang, 2006). The target group also used Compensation strategies in guessing unknown words and writing (Kotesombat, 2003; Taw, 2008; Yang, 2010).

According to the above, although the target group used similar English Language Learning Strategies, the outcomes were different since the continuity of usage in learning techniques and strategies. The low achievement target group exploited English Language Learning Strategies for recreation rather than focusing on academic area for developing their English learning truly, for instance, game playing, watching the football match on TV, and speaking with oneself in front of the mirror for teaching. The students were lazy and didn’t practice continuously except studying in class only. They didn’t like to read. But, they practiced what they liked such as watching cartoon. They didn’t prefer watching movie or listening to music. It was supported by Griffiths’s (2003) study, found that the most progress students were persons who increased frequency in using Language Learning Strategies. Likewise, the high learning achievement would use learning strategies more than those with low achievement (Jindaprasert, 1997; Kanyot, 1997). Taw (2008) also stated that in part of application, the teachers should encourage their students to be familiar with language learning strategies, able to apply in English learning, assign work task as well as select the lessons facilitating students to use the language learning strategies more. It was supported by Wong and Nunan’s (2011) conclusions that the attitude towards language learning was a key expressing the differences between high
achievement and low achievement students. Since the former viewed the language as an instrument for communication rather than only the required course in program which they had to pass the examination. Besides, they administered various strategies as well as a long period of time in practicing outside their class for developing the better learning techniques.

5.2 The development of English learning

5.2.1 Song

The students collaborated in working, consulting, expressing opinions, and participating in activities for creating the activities conveying content of songs. They enjoyed studying the vocabularies from the exercise of song vocabularies. It could be concluded that the Supplementary Exercise of Song Vocabularies could alleviate their anxiety in vocabulary learning which would cause their low English Language Learning Achievement. Furthermore, it could motivate them to learn vocabularies as well. The songs could help them to be ready for applying vocabularies in new situation as well as using vocabularies in the exercise in their daily life. It was congruent with linguistic principle that the songs could enhance the students’ readiness in daily life language since it was more related to their life experience than other kinds of media. In addition, the song material was a good example for practical language use. (Peacock, 1997, p.152; Li, 1998 p. 685; Schoepp, 2001; Willis and Mason, 1994 ; cited in Cheunboon, 2009). It was supported by Dee (2003) who found that the students obtained better knowledge in vocabularies as well as higher level of creative writing after using game activity. Pongsai (2009) found that the students studying the Verb Phrase by song, had higher learning achievement at 0.01 significant level. Jankaew (2009) and Ritchai (2007) found that the experimental group students studying by song using for enhancing the grammar knowledge, received significantly higher level of grammar knowledge than those of control group studying by general technique. It was supported by Cakir (1999 cited by Ritchai, 2007) that the song was an important media including various characteristics which could be understood, enjoyable, authentic, full of language needed to be used in real situation.

5.2.2 Movies

The students were interested in watching the movies by listening to movies attentively. They collaborated in working with their partner for getting main idea of story. They used electronic dictionary to find the meaning of vocabularies which was supported by Nuwongsri’s (2003) findings that the development of listening skill by self-study through audio movies, could improve and develop the samples’ listening skill. They were more confident in listening as well as satisfied with development of listening skill by this technique further.

5.2.3 Cartoon Strips

The students had fun with cartoon reading, searching for meaning needed to communicate to readers by the cartoons. They had role playing with their fiends in group as the cartoons in assigned story. Moreover, they drew pictures of cartoons composed by themselves. They collaborated and were attentive in studying very well. It was supported by Punmapat (2010) findings found that the development of language learning by cartoon, could improve the students’ vocabulary knowledge, stimulate their learning interest, ellevate their reading skill, and help them to gain better comprehension in the lessons.

5.2.4 Aesop Fables

The students enjoyed reading Aesop Fables. They cooperated in group working for role playing in communicating the story. In addition, they learned from the lesson from stories they had read. It was congruent with Sangpan’s (2010) findings of development in English Language Reading Activities by using Easope Tale, was served to the students’ needs since it could develop their prior knowledge, improve their reading ability. Consequently, they had better learning achievement. Dechjaroen (2006) found that the students’ post-test learning achievement and English language Learning Skill was higher than the pre-test at 0.01 significant level. Besides, according to the development for target group by using those learning strategies, found that the target group had
better English Learning Behaviors as well as Cooperative Learning as social strategies enhancing their language proficiency. It was supported by Jacobs and Goh’s (2007) statement that the students’ learning levels were in the same. Their anxiety was lowered down. They had opportunity to ask their friends’ support, express opinion by speaking out, be able to ask and share language knowledge with each other both of outside and inside their class.

6. Conclusion

According to the study, it could be viewed that this study included limitation: it was only the study and comparison of students’ English learning techniques as well as language learning strategies. Therefore, future research should be conducted by studying the relationship between teachers’ teaching techniques, and students’ English Language Learning Strategies whether they were congruent in order to be useful for instructional management in developing the students to learn English more efficiently as well as creating the model for English teaching further.

Acknowledgements

This study was funded by Office of Research Administration, Khon Kaen University, Thailand. Furthermore, I would like to thank Faculty of Education, Khon Kaen University to support in conducting this study and Putcharee Junpeng for her help with the data analysis and suggestions. I am extremely grateful.

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