

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter goes into details about the concepts of learning strategies, the previous studies, and the pragmatic research on learning strategies in language classrooms. In the related theories, the present study primarily looked into the basic principles of learning strategies in regard to the variables gender, school level and cultural background. This chapter also leads to the underlying theories that mastermind the present study. In addition, the metacognitive, cognitive, memory, compensation, affective and social strategies, methodological issues are also thoroughly presented.

2.2 Related Literature

2.2.1 Language Learning Strategies

The idea for this research is to comprehend that language learning strategies being specific actions, behaviours, tactics or techniques, facilitate the learning of the target language by the language learner. All language learners, needless to say, use language learning strategies in the learning process. Research into what learners do to learn a

language has resulted in the identification of specific strategies and in attempts to classify them in some way or another. Green and Oxford (1995) have broadly identified language strategies as “specific actions or techniques that students use, intentionally, to improve their progress in developing L2 skills” whereas Dansereau (1985) stated that learning strategies are ‘a set of processes or steps used by a learner that can facilitate the acquisition, storage, and/or utilization of information’. In other words, both researches have recognized the strategies in language learning as the means and ways the learners employ to help them progress better in their ability to stack, retrieve and then transform knowledge into skills, expertise, talent or proficiency.

In another attempt, O’Malley and Chamot (1990) define strategies as “intentional cognitive or affective actions taken by the learner in order to learn both simple and complex materials”. Indeed, both not only primarily look into the aspects of memory skills but they also take into consideration the socio-emotive aspects involve in language acquisition and learning. However, Oxford (1990) on the other hand, argues that commonly, their definition does not fully convey the excitement or richness of learning strategies. Instead, she expands the definition by saying, “learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations”. As such, learning strategies are related to the effectiveness of the learner in delivering the outcomes into another new context of learning. They do not only contribute to the success of the learner’s performance but the learner also takes the pleasures in exploiting them. Hence, there are strategies that dwell in the students’ learning as they do apply certain learning

strategies in their classroom. Even findings by Cohen (1990), takes in the characteristic feature of learning strategies as “the learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner”. Meaning, students realized that when it comes to language learning, they need to switch their learning strategies. For instance, understanding the forms and functions in English conversation will require them to select the socio affective learning as their strategy in order to convey their meanings and making them understood by others.

That is the reason why when it comes to language classroom, students are always consciously struggling for words to convey their thought. They will search for their paralinguistic features to help convey emotions and meanings or take on sound effects to further enhance their explanation. There are other students, who are more artistic, prefer the use of advance organizers or concept map to assist them have a mental picture of their learning. Weinstein and Mayer (1986), noted that these kind of learning strategies have “learning facilitation as a goal and intentional on the part of the learners”. It means that students plan which learning strategies they are going to use, consider the needs for such strategies and therefore, utilize the chosen learning strategies to facilitate them achieving their learning outcomes. Weinstein and Mayer (1986) further elaborate that the goal of strategy use is to “affect the learner’s motivational or affective state, or the way in which the learner selects, acquires, organizes, or interacts new knowledge”. Certainly, they are different from teaching strategies (the techniques used by teachers to enable students to learn) in that; it is the learner, not the teacher, who exercises control over the operations of the designated activity (O’Malley et al., 1985).

Naiman et. al. (1975) named six strategies of successful language learners: selecting language situations that allow one's preferences to be used; actively being involved in language learning; seeing language as both a rule system and a communication tool; extending and revising one's understanding of the language; learning to think in the language; and addressing the affective demands of language learning. Hosenfeld (1976) introduced the "think aloud" introspective process to determine what strategies learners use while performing the language tasks. A large scale study by Naiman et. al. (1978) utilized case studies with adults, classroom observations, and interviews with students to elicit second language success factors. Five general strategies were identified, including the fact that the good learner uses the language in real communication and monitors his or her interlanguage. Rubin (1981, 1987) identified strategies contributing to language learning success either directly, for example, inductive, inferencing, practice, memorization or indirectly, for example, creating practice opportunities, using production tricks.

Oxford (1989) synthesized earlier work on successful language learning strategies in general and in relation to each of the four language skills. Successful language learners manage their own learning process through metacognitive strategies, such as paying attention, self-evaluating and self-monitoring. They control their emotions and attitudes through affective strategies, such as anxiety reduction and self-encouragement. They work with others to learn the language, using social strategies like asking questions and becoming culturally aware. They use memory strategies, such as grouping, imagery and structured review, to get information into memory and to recall it when needed.

They employ the new language directly with cognitive strategies, such as practicing naturalistically, analyzing contrastively and summarizing. Finally, they overcome knowledge limitations through compensatory strategies, like guessing meanings intelligently and using synonyms or other production tricks when the precise expression is unknown.

Only in a few studies (Hosenfeld, 1976; Abraham and Vann, 1987; Chamot and Kupper, 1989) have unsuccessful language learners been observed. Three distinct points of view exist in the studies with respect to strategies of less effective second language learners. The first view is that less effective second language learners do not really know what strategies they use; they cannot readily describe their strategies (Nyikos, 1987). The second perspective is that such learners use fewer strategies than those of more successful learners, and those strategies of less effective learners often involve non-communicative or rather mundane strategies such as translation, rote memorization, and repetition (Nyikos, 1987). The third viewpoint is that many ineffective second language learners are indeed aware of their strategies and use just as many as do the more effective learners. However, less skilled learners apply these strategies in a random, even desperate manner, without careful orchestration and without targeting the strategies to the task and they do not demonstrate the careful orchestration and creativity shown by more effective learners (Vann & Abraham, 1990).

The classification framework of learning strategies emerged from efforts for identifying the characteristics of the “good language learner” (Naiman et. al., 1978;

Rubin, 1975) and different researchers have classified their lists of behaviours according to various criteria, such as whether they contribute directly or indirectly to learning (Rubin, 1981); whether they are cognitive or metacognitive (O'Malley et. al., (1985b) and whether they are practiced in the classroom, in individual study or during interaction with others (Politzer, 1983; Politzer and McGroarty, 1985). Rubin (1981), for example, proposed a classification scheme and subsumes learning strategies under two primary groupings and a number of subgroups. Rubin's first primary category consisting of strategies that directly affect learning includes clarification or verification, monitoring, memorization, guessing, inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning and practicing. The second primary category, consisting of strategies that contribute indirectly to learning, includes creating practice opportunities and using production tricks such as communication strategies.

In recent years, the importance of language learning strategies in the teaching and learning process has been argued by writers such as Oxford (1990) who divided language learning strategies into six groups – memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social; and developed a questionnaire known as the Strategy Inventory Language Learning (SILL) which will be used as an instrument for data collection in this present study.

Jones (1998) believes that Oxford has developed a system of language learning strategies which is more comprehensive and detailed than earlier classification models. Oxford (1990) divides strategies into two major classes: direct and indirect. Direct

strategies, which “involve direct learning and use of the subject matter, in this case a new language” are subdivided into three groups: memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies, which “contribute indirectly but powerfully to learning” (Oxford, 1990) are also subdivided into three groups: metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. Compensation strategies, such as guessing unknown words while listening and reading or using circumlocution in speaking and writing, are needed to overcome any gaps in knowledge of the language.

Memory strategies, according to Oxford (1990), such as creating mental linkages and employing actions, aid in entering information into long-term memory and retrieving information when needed for communication. On the other hand, cognitive strategies refer to the steps or operations used in learning or problem-solving which require direct analysis, transformation, or synthesis of learning materials. They may be referred to as declarative and procedural knowledge as they help assimilate information into long-term memory. Rubin (1981) identified six main cognitive learning strategies contributing directly to language learning that is (1) clarification or verification; (2) guessing or inductive inferencing; (3) deductive reasoning; (4) practice; (5) memorization; and (6) monitoring. However, in Oxford’s taxonomy (1990) of language learning strategies identifies cognitive strategies as analyzing and reasoning, are used for forming and revising internal mental modes and receiving and producing messages in the target language. O’Malley et. al. (1985) reported that cognitive strategies are more limited to specific learning tasks and they involve more direct manipulation of the learning material itself. Repetition, resourcing, translation, grouping, note taking, deduction,

recombination, imagery, auditory representation, key word, contextualization, elaboration, transfer, inferencing are among the most important cognitive strategies.

O'Malley et. al. (1985) stated that “metacognitive” is a term to express executive function, strategies which require planning for learning, thinking about the learning process as it is taking place, monitoring of one’s production or comprehension, and evaluating learning after an activity is completed. Hence, metacognitive strategies are referred to as conditional knowledge which operates the “executive control” on the use of learning strategies. In other words, according to what Gagne (1977) has specified, learning strategies help learners attend to facts of a particular category, encode information, retrieve knowledge from their long term memory and implement problem-solving skills. Among the main metacognitive strategies, it is possible to include advance organizers, directed attention, selective attention, self-management, functional planning, self-monitoring, delayed production and self-evaluation. Oxford (1990) identifies metacognitive strategies as helping learners to exercise executive control through planning, arranging, focusing, and evaluation their own learning process whereas Rubin (1987) refers them as strategies used to oversee, regulate or self-direct language learning. They involve various processes as planning, prioritizing, setting goals and self-management.

Compensation strategies, such as guessing unknown words while listening and reading or using circumlocution in speaking and writing are needed to overcome any gaps in knowledge of the language (Oxford, 1990). Whereas, affective strategies enable

learners to control feelings, motivations, and attitudes related to language learning. Social strategies, such as asking questions and cooperation with others, facilitate interaction with others, often in a discourse situation.

Besides metacognitive and affective strategies, social strategies are regarded as indirect strategies for language learning by Oxford (1990). These social strategies involved asking questions, cooperating with others and empathizing with others. They can also be associated with socio-affective strategies (Brown, 1987) as social-mediating activity and transacting others. Cooperation and question for clarification are the main socio-affective strategies. Stern (1992) classifies these strategies as interpersonal strategies. He stated that learners should contact with native speakers and cooperate with for them. Learners must become acquainted with the target culture. They should monitor their own development and evaluate their own performance.

2.3 Related Studies

2.3.1 Language Learning Strategy and Proficiency

Language learning strategy has attained much of researchers' interest in ESL classroom from past years. For instance, O'Malley et. al. (1985a) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990) firstly involved conducting interviews with seventy high-school age students enrolled in ESL classes, who were all native speakers of Spanish to determine if the strategies identified can be classified within existing learning frameworks. Their subjects had completed various psychological tasks and secondly, the theoretical analysis of reading comprehension and problem-solving tasks. From this data, they established that three

types of strategies were being used: metacognitive, cognitive and social or affective. Within the metacognitive category were those strategies which involve “knowing about learning and controlling learning through planning, monitoring and evaluating the learning activity” (O’Malley et. al., 1989). Cognitive strategies are more directly related to individual learning tasks than metacognitive strategies and involve the manipulation or transformation of the material to be learned. And a third broad group of learning strategies was referred to as that of social or affective strategies by O’Malley et. al.. (1985a). According to Fleming and Walls (1998), social or affective strategies mainly involve the learner in communicative interaction with another person; for example, when collaboration with peers in problem-solving exercises.

Many researchers have described successful language learners and their strategies. One major finding among them is that successful language learners in general use more and better learning strategies (Oxford, 1989, 1993). This result has appeared consistently in second language learning strategy studies (Stern 1975; Rubin, 1975; Hosenfeld, 1977; Naiman et. al. 1978). These early researchers tended to make lists of strategies presumed to be essential for all good language learners. For instance, by means of observation and interviews with learners and teachers, Rubin (1975) suggested the good language learner is a willing and accurate guesser, has a strong, preserving drive to communicate; focuses on form by looking for patterns; takes advantage of all practice opportunities; monitors his or her own speech as well as that of others; and pays attention to meaning.

Naiman et. al (1978) conducted interviews with adults in a major classroom study of learners of French as a second language and suggested that language learning strategies form only one part of a broader picture of what constitutes a “good language learner”, that is, what the learner does and what kind of environment facilitates this learning process. They argue for further research “to study critically the different inventories of learning strategies and techniques and to develop an exhaustive list, clearly related to a language learning model (Naiman, et al., 1978).

In a study reported by Liu (2004), the descriptive statistics for overall strategy use ($M = 3.25$, $SD = .53$) indicate that the participants are medium strategies users. They reported having medium to high frequency use of each of the six categories of strategy with mean statistics ranging between $M=3.47$ and $M=2.91$; with metacognitive strategy being the most frequently used, and memory strategy the least frequently used. Between them by order of descending frequency are compensation strategies, affective strategies, cognitive strategies and social strategies.

The findings of high frequency use of metacognitive strategies and least frequent use of memory strategies are consistent with the aforementioned studies on English majors by Nisbet (2002), and Han and Lin (2000). However, they are inconsistent with the few existing SILL studies focusing on non-English majors, such as the study by Yu (2003), where the non-English majors reported using compensation strategies most frequently and memory strategies least frequently. Nor was it consistent with the research by Griffiths and Parr (1999) in an ESL learning context in Auckland who found

social strategies being the most frequently used and memory strategies being the least frequently used.

The consistent findings regarding memory strategies use across the studies in China using different subjects seem to indicate that although memory strategies can be powerful contributors to language learning, the low frequency use of memory strategy by university students may indicate that beyond elementary levels of language learning, students simply do not use this strategy very much, or that students are not aware of how often they actually do employ memory strategies (Oxford, 1990; Oxford and Nyikos, 1989).

The high frequency use of metacognitive strategies seems to prove that metacognitive strategies are essential for successful language learning since these strategies provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process through planning, monitoring and evaluating (Oxford, 1990) and helping to seek practice opportunities, thus keeping them on the right track of learning which is crucial in a target language input poor environment such as China. Yet, current research findings of most frequently use of metacognitive strategies and least frequent use of memory strategies seem to contradict the stereotypical descriptions of learners from Asian backgrounds who prefer rote learning and language rules as reported by O'Malley and Chamot (1990). It is also inconsistent with the research findings focusing on non-English majors in China and some other SILL researches such as Kaylani (1996); Bedell and Oxfords (1996); Dryer and Oxford (1996); Bremmer (1999); Shmais (2003) and Griffiths and Pars (1999).

However, the consistent findings with Chinese English majors may indicate that these learners may use somewhat different strategies from other learners.

A rich body of empirical studies has investigated the relationships between learners' L2 (second language) proficiency and strategy use with the majority indicating that conscious, "tailored" use of strategies is related to language achievement and proficiency, and successful learners employ a wider variety of strategies to improve their language skills and performance (Oxford, 1996). In Bialystok's (1981) study on a group of grade 10 and 12 students learning French in Toronto, she found that monitoring strategies and strategies for functional practice affected learning outcome in a positive way as measured by achievement tests in writing, listening, reading and grammar.

A large-scale investigation of 1200 university foreign language students in the United States by Oxford and Nyikos (1989) found that greater strategy use was associated with learners' higher perceptions of proficiency in reading, listening, and speaking. Ehrman and Oxford's (1989) experimental study of 'optimal' adult learners at the US Foreign Service Institute indicated greater strategies use among professional language educators than the students. Dreyer and Oxford's (1986) study of Afrikaans University ESL majors reported significant positive correlations between strategy use and proficiency.

The study of Jordan high school EFL learners by Kaylani (1996) revealed that the use of memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies was significantly higher for

successful students than less successful ones. Wharton's (1976) study of 678 bilingual university students studying Japanese and French course in Singapore showed significant correlation between strategy use and French/Japanese proficiency, with more successful learners employing more frequently the learning strategies than do poor proficiency learners.

A study by Bremner (1999) on Hong Kong English majors also found that out of the 50 specific strategies, 11 were significantly correlated to proficiency. Hoang (1999) found more proficient learners use more strategies and more effectively than the ones with lower levels. By analyzing diaries from 12 learners, Halbach (2000) reported that subjects who got higher marks during their final term exam reported using strategies more frequently than did the less successful students.

A study on university medical majors in China by Yu (2003) found that learners' strategy use was strongly correlated with listening proficiency. The study by Shmais (2003) among a group of 99 university English majors in Palestine revealed that there is significant memory strategies use difference between very good and good learners in favour of very good learners.

However, some research findings reveal a different story regarding the relationship between strategy use and proficiency. Green (1991, cited Bedell and Oxford, 1996) studied 213 students of English and found that high proficiency students used more strategies than low proficiency ones, but moderately proficient students used more

strategies than either high or low proficiency students, thus a curvilinear pattern. The study by Mullines (1992, cited Bedell and Oxford, 1996) on 110 English majors in Thailand failed to reveal significant correlation between any of the three proficiency measures and overall strategy use although they did correlate with certain strategy categories.

Likewise, a more thorough and recent research done by Liu (2004) showed that there was a significant difference in the frequency of EFL learning strategy used by EFL proficiency. In an independent sample t-test, Liu (2004) reported that high proficient learners reported statistically more frequent strategy use than low proficient learners. The research statistically revealed that the higher a learner's EFL proficiency, the more frequent use of EFL learning strategies, and the lower a person's EFL proficiency, the less frequent use of EFL learning strategies. This may indicate that the low proficiency EFL learners reported insufficient strategy use. This finding is consistent with some of the previous SILL research findings such as the study by Yu (2003) and Dreyer and Oxford (1996), which further indicates that learners with higher proficiency across cultures may use a wider variety of strategies more frequently than do less proficient learners do. The strongest correlation between proficiency and metacognitive strategies use in the study was also revealed in the study by Nisbet (2002) and Dreyer and Oxford (1996). This may indicate that the more proficient learners under investigation employ more executive control on their EFL learning to achieve a better proficiency. The lowest correlation between EFL proficiency and affective strategies use shows that the learners surveyed realized the importance of affective strategies in their EFL learning, yet they are

not used to employing this strategy to a higher extent. This designates that the more proficient EFL learner use affective strategies least often compared with the rest categories of strategies.

Summarization of the studies that show the findings of relationship between the second language proficiency and the strategies used is shown in Table 2.2. We can sum up that foreign or second language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques students use (often consciously) to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing and using the second language (Oxford, 1990). Researches repeatedly showed that the conscious, tailored use of such strategies is related to language achievement and proficiency.

2.3.2 *Language Learning Strategy and Gender*

Gender differences have been found in a rich area of human social and cognitive development (Kaylani, 1996). In language learning strategy research, efforts have been made to investigate the strategies used by males and females and ‘the sex difference findings to date show that in typical language learning situations, females use significantly more learning strategies than males and use them more often’ (Oxford, 1989).

In the aforementioned studies, Oxford and Nyikos (1989) found that females showed greater use of three out of five strategy categories than males did. Similarly, Ehrman and Oxford (1989) found females reported significantly greater use of language

Table 2.1: Summary of Investigations Comparing Findings of Relationship between Second Language Proficiency and Strategies Used

<i>Investigator</i>	<i>Proficiency Group</i>	<i>Strategy Used</i>	<i>Test/Proficiency</i>	<i>Findings</i>
Bialystok (1981)	10 and 12 years old	Monitoring	Achievement <i>writing</i> <i>listening</i> <i>reading</i> <i>grammar</i>	Positive relationship
Oxford and Nyikos (1989)	1200 university students	-	Reading Listening Speaking	Greater strategy used
Ehrman and Oxford (1989)	Adult learners - <i>professional language educators</i> - <i>students</i>	-	(Experimental)	Greater strategy used among professional language educators
Kaylani (1996)	EFL Jordan high school learners	Memory Cognitive Metacognitive	-	Strategies used was significantly higher for successful students
Wharton (1997)	678 bilingual university students	-	Studying French and Japanese	Significant correlation between strategies used and proficiency

Table 2.1: (continued)

	12 diary entries from learners	-	Final exam	Higher marks gained by students using strategies
Halbach (2002)				
Shmais (2003)	99 university Palestine English majors - <i>Very good learners</i> - <i>Good learners</i>	Memory	-	Significant difference
Green (1991, cited Bedell & Oxford, 1996)	213 students of English	-	-	More strategies used in high proficiency students; moderate proficiency students used more strategies than higher or lower proficiency students.
Mullines (1992, cited Bedell & Oxford, 1996)	110 Thailand English majors	-	-	No significant difference between three proficiency measures and overall strategy

learning strategies in four strategy categories, yet males have not been shown to exceed females in the use of any general category of language learning strategies. Dreyer and Oxford (1996) also found males and females reported different patterns of strategy use with females using strategies more often than males did. In the diary study by Oxford et al. (1996), among a group of 26 female and male learning Spanish as a foreign language, they found that significantly more females and males reported using memory, cognitive and social strategies.

In a study on Korean learners by Ok (2003), it was found that Korean high school girls scored significantly higher in five of the six strategy categories than boys did. However, the study by Kaylani (1996) revealed that gender is related in complex ways to the frequency of strategy use. Although she found significant memory, cognitive, compensation and affective strategies use differences between males and females in favour of females; it was found successful female students' language learning strategy profile resembled more the strategy profile of successful males than that of the unsuccessful female.

A significant difference in the frequency of EFL learning strategy used by 87 male and 292 female English major Chinese students was found out by Liu's (2004) independent sample t-test. His statistical analysis stated that females reported more frequent EFL learning strategy uses than males. The study found a statistically significant memory, affective and overall strategy use differences ($p < .05$) by gender in favour of females. This finding may indicate that the females in this study may know

how to control their emotions during learning better than their male counterpart who may also reflect females' emotional side in real life; females also use more often memory strategies to accumulate a more solid foundation for their EFL learning than males do.

According to several studies, the gender of the students makes a significant difference in learning a second or foreign language, according to several studies (Politzer, 1983; Oxford et. al., 1998; Ehrman and Oxford, 1989; Oxford and Nyikos, 1989; Oxford et. al., 1993; Oxford and Ehrman, 1995; Lee, 1994; Kim, 1995; Oh, 1996). All studies which examined gender as a variable in the use of language learning strategies reported that significant gender differences almost always occurred in a single direction, showing greater use of language learning strategies by females. Politzer (1983) reported that females used social learning strategies significantly more than males. His only comment about gender differences was "Variance due to sex of learners seems relatively minor, but does exist with regard to such variables as social interaction". Ehrman and Oxford (1989), using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) with both students and instructors at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute came to the conclusion that compared with males, females reported significantly greater use of language learning strategies in four areas: general study strategies, functional practice strategies, strategies for searching for and communication meaning, and self-management strategies.

Oxford and Nyikos (1989) found similar results in a study of 1,200 university students; female learners used formal rule-related practice strategies, general study strategies and conversational input use, elicitation strategies more frequently than did

male learners. But unfortunately, as they indicated, too many other potentially interesting gender differences either have not been explored or have not been reported. These three studies (Politzer, 1983; Ehrman and Oxford, 1989; Oxford and Nyikos, 1989) found a wide range of sex differences in strategy especially frequency and variety of strategy use was significantly greater for women. Oxford et. al. (1993) also found girls showed a number of differences from boys in terms of motivation, achievement, and frequency of strategy use on their study of factors affecting Japanese language achievement for high school students who were enrolled in the Japanese Satellite Program (JSP) in the U.S.

However, Kim (1995) investigated the use of the language learning strategies of Korean adult ESL learners and found no significant differences between males and females in the use of strategies. The finding did not support the assumption that gender differences will affect the choice of strategies. In addition, Oh (1996), who conducted a study involving 60 EFL students from the National Fisheries University in Korea, found that gender difference did not affect the use of strategy and suggested that in the Korean context, college students' attitude influenced strategy use more strongly than did gender. On the contrary, Lee (1994) investigated the factors that affect the use of language learning strategies of Korean middle, high and college students; and reported that girls showed more frequent use of strategies than boys in middle school, but not in high school and college.

It shows that gender differences are not necessarily universal. For instance, Taiwanese studies showed mixed results concerning the relationships between gender and strategy use. Wang (2001) investigated 301 Taiwanese senior high school EFL learners'

listening comprehension strategy use. In Wang's research, female listeners reported more frequent use of strategies than male listeners. Compared with male listeners, females planned their listening, employed both top-down and bottom-up processing, took notes, and asked others for help significantly more often. However, no gender significance was found in Taiwanese studies by Luo (1998) and Peng (2001).

Gender differences in strategy use may be more important and more prevalent than previously found these days. If differences do exist, an understanding of them may help ESL or EFL teachers guide learners to take better control of their comprehension and learning processes.

2.3.4 *Language Learning Strategy and School Level*

According to several studies, language course level also influences how students learn foreign or second languages. Politzer (1983) found that course level influenced the learning strategy choice of foreign language learners, with higher-level students using more "positive", student-directed, communicative or functional strategies. Chamot, et. al. (1987) discovered that cognitive strategy use decreased and metacognitive (planning, organizing and evaluating) strategy use increased as foreign language course level increased, but that socio-affective strategy use remained low across all course levels. Bialystok (1981) and Oxford & Nyikos (1989) found differences in strategy use as students advanced in foreign languages. Formal practice with rules and forms was less and less effective (and less used) as students advanced, but functional practice with communicative language showed no such limitations.

Advancement in course level or years of study does not necessarily mean that students use better strategies in every instance. Cohen and Aphek (1981), in studying English speakers who were learning Hebrew, discovered that both good and bad learning strategies appeared across course levels. Nevertheless, most of the research does indeed show that in general, the more advanced the language learner, the better the strategies used. It might be hypothesized that more advanced students would use somewhat different learning strategies than beginners in the secondary schools, since it was indicated that students of different ages and different stages of L2 learning used different learning strategies often being employed by more advanced students (Chamot et. al, 1987; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1992).

In an interesting study of first-grade Spanish speakers in the U.S., Wong Fillmore (1976) found a student, Nora, who was far superior to the other children in learning ESL. By the end of the school year, Nora had learned more English than many of her peers would in two years or more. Nora's distinguishing characteristic was that she seized every possible opportunity to use her English skills when interacting with other children. She initiated more interaction with native English speaking peers than did the other Spanish-speaking children. She used guessing frequently. Nora gave the impression that she could speak English fluently by employing whatever she knew and not worrying about details. This kept her in conversations that would otherwise have ended, and it allowed her oral proficiency to continue to grow as she was included in conversations and activities. In this study, most ESL learners initiated far fewer interactions with native speakers than did Nora.

Not surprisingly, a different study by Wong Fillmore (1985) found that many Chinese ESL learners with imperfect or weak English skills were reluctant to initiate conversations with native English speakers. Since not all young ESL students are likely to initiate conversations with their native English-speaking peers, native English-speaking children must often start conversations, with ESL learners responding. Hirschler (1994) studied interactions initiated by five native English-speaking preschool children in a classroom that was comprised half of native English speakers and half of ESL learners (speakers of Spanish or Khmer).

2.3.5 Language Learning Strategy and Cultural Background

Numerous studies have shown that cultural background and ethnicity has a strong influence on the kinds of strategies used by language learners. For instance, Asian students seem to prefer strategies involving rote memorization and language rules (Poltzer and McGroarty, 1985; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) as opposed to more communicative strategies. Poltzer (1983) also found that Hispanics and Asians differed strongly in the kinds of strategies they used for language learning; Hispanics chose more social, interactive strategies, while Asians opted for greater rote memorization. Oxford (1992) summarized that rote memorization was more prevalent among Asian ESL students than among their Hispanic counterparts.

However, interestingly enough, Grainger (1997) exploring the relationship between strategy use and ethnicity for 133 learners of Japanese from various cultural backgrounds (including Australia, Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Germany, USA and Malaysia) found that contrary to expectations, the rote learning aspect was the least

popular category among the students of Asian backgrounds. In addition, Reid (1987) found that some Asian students preferred strategies such as working independently and resisted social, cooperative learning, unlike students of other cultural backgrounds such as a Hispanic background. Considering the prior researches' results, cultural background in nation's origin or ethnicity might be related to the choice of language learning strategy.

2.4 Theoretical Review

As noted by Griffiths and Parr (2001) over the years many different methods and approaches to the teaching and learning of language to and by speakers of other languages (SOL), each with its own theoretical basis, have come and gone in and out of fashion (for instance the grammar-translation method, the audio lingual method, the communicative approach). Language learning strategies, although still fuzzily defined and controversially classified, are increasingly attracting the interest of contemporary educators because of their potential to enhance learning.

In the light of this interest, this present study would like to take a look at the theory underlying language learning strategies beginning from the perspective of the various other theories, methods and approaches from which, and alongside which, language learning strategy theory has developed.

Derived from the way Latin and Greek were taught, the grammar-translation method, as its name suggests, relied heavily on the teaching of grammar and practicing translation as its main teaching and learning activities (Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992).

The major focus of this method tended to be reading and writing, with very little attention paid to speaking and listening. Vocabulary was typically taught in lists, and a high priority was given to accuracy and to the ability to construct correct sentences. Instruction was typically conducted in the students' native language. This resulted in, as Richards and Rodgers (1986, pp.3-4) put it, the type of grammar-translation courses remembered with distaste by thousands of school learners, for whom foreign language learning meant a tedious experience of memorising endless lists of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary and attempting to produce perfect translations of stilted or literary prose.

The possibility that students might use language learning strategies to promote their own learning had little or no place in grammar-translation theory, and is rarely if ever mentioned in any literature on the subject, as Tarone and Yule (1989, p.133) point out when they comment "relatively little attention seems to have been paid, in any consistent way, to considerations of the whole process from the learner's point of view". It tended to be assumed that if learners simply followed the grammar-translation method they would, as a matter of course, learn language, although the seeds of an awareness of the importance of the learner's contribution to the learning process was perhaps there in, for instance, suggestions for how to remember vocabulary lists (mnemonics, grouping, repetition etc) which were quite common in grammar-translation classrooms.

The audio-lingual method grew partly out of a reaction against the limitations of the grammar-translation method, and partly out of the urgent war-time demands for fluent

speakers of languages such as German, Italian and Japanese. The “Army Method” was developed to produce military personnel with conversational proficiency in the target language. After the war, the “Army Method” attracted the attention of linguists already looking for an alternative to grammar-translation and became known as the audio lingual method. By the sixties, audio-lingualism was widespread (Richards and Rodgers, 1986).

In direct contrast to the grammar-translation method, the audio lingual method was based on the belief that speaking and listening are the most basic language skills and should be emphasised before reading and writing (Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992). Audio lingual teaching methods depended heavily on drills and repetition, which were justified according to behaviourist theories that language is a system of habits which can be taught and learnt on the stimulus, response and reinforcement basis that behaviourists believed controlled all human learning, including language learning.

Since audio lingual theory depended on the automatic patterning of behavior there was little or no recognition given to any conscious contribution which the individual learner might make in the learning process. Indeed, learners were discouraged from taking initiative in the learning situation because they might make mistakes (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). If anything, there was even less place for individual language learning strategies in audio lingual theory than there had been in grammar-translation theory, except, perhaps, in a very limited form in the exercising of memory and cognitive strategies by means of repetition and substitution exercises, and even this was rarely, if ever, made explicit. The effect of audio lingual techniques of rote learning, repetition,

imitation, memorisation and pattern practice was to minimise the importance of explicit learning strategies in the language learning process (Stern, 1992).

In the early sixties, audio-lingualism was commonly seen as a major breakthrough which would revolutionise the teaching and learning of languages. No more tedious grammar rules! No more vocabulary lists! No more hours spent translating boring texts! Audio-lingualism, as Stern (1980) puts it “raised hopes of ushering in a golden age of language learning”. By the end of the sixties, however, the limitations of the audio lingual method were beginning to make themselves obvious. Contrary to audio lingual theory, as Hutchinson and Waters (1990) comment, language learners did not act according to behaviourist expectations. They wanted to translate things, demanded grammar rules, found endless repetition boring and not conducive to learning.

It was at this time, in the mid to late sixties, that the ideas of the highly influential linguist, Noam Chomsky (for instance Chomsky, 1965; 1968) began to have a major effect on linguistic theory. Chomsky postulated that all normal human beings are born with a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which enables them to develop language from an innate set of principles which he called the Universal Grammar (UG). Chomsky’s theory of Transformational-Generative Grammar attempts to explain how original utterances are generated from a language user’s underlying competence. Chomsky believed that behaviourist theory could not explain the complexities of generative grammar and concluded that “the creative aspect of language use, when investigated with care and respect for the facts, shows that current notions of habit and

generalisation, as determinants of behaviour or knowledge, are quite inadequate” (Chomsky, 1968).

Although Chomsky’s theories directly related mainly to first language learners, his view of the learner as a generator of rules was taken up by Corder (1967) who argued that language errors made by students who are speakers of other languages indicate the development of underlying linguistic competence and reflect the learners’ attempts to organise linguistic input. The intermediate system created while the learner is trying to come to terms with the target language was later called “interlanguage” (IL) by Selinker (1972) who viewed learner errors as evidence of positive efforts by the student to learn the new language. This view of language learning allowed for the possibility of learners making deliberate attempts to control their own learning and, along with theories of cognitive processes in language learning promoted by writers such as McLaughlin (1978) and Bialystok (1978), contributed to a research thrust in the mid to late seventies aimed at discovering how learners employ learning strategies to promote the learning of language (for instance Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco, 1978). The idea that teachers should be concerned not only with “finding the best method or with getting the correct answer” but also with assisting a student in order to “enable him to learn on his own” (Rubin, 1975) was, at the time, quite revolutionary.

At much the same time, however, as researchers such as Rubin, Stern and Naiman et. al. were working to develop an awareness of language learning strategies, Krashen (for instance Krashen, 1976; 1977) dealt the fledgling language learning strategy

movement a body blow and took off in almost exactly the opposite direction. Challenging the rule-driven theories of the grammar-translation method, the audio-lingual behaviourist theories that language can be taught as a system of habits, as well as the idea of learners being able to consciously control their own learning, Krashen proposed his five hypotheses. Summarised briefly (Krashen and Terrell, 1983), these consist of *the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis* (conscious learning is an ineffective way of developing language, which is better acquired through natural communication), *the Natural Order Hypothesis* (grammatical structures of a language are acquired in a predictable order), *the Monitor Hypothesis* (conscious learning is of very little value to an adult language learner, and can only be useful under certain conditions as a monitor or editor), *the Input Hypothesis* (language is acquired by understanding input which is a little beyond the current level of competence (comprehensible input)) and *the Affective Filter Hypothesis* (a learner's emotions and attitudes can act as a filter which slows down the acquisition of language. When the affective filter is high it can block language development).

Taken to their extreme, Krashen's hypotheses led to the belief that conscious teaching and learning were not useful in the language learning process, and that any attempt to teach or learn language in a formal kind of a way was doomed to failure. By implication, therefore, since in Krashen's view conscious learning had so little value, there was very little room for conscious language learning strategies to play a role in the process of language development. Many of Krashen's ideas have been soundly criticised over the years, and his penchant for sweeping statements, such as "speech cannot be taught directly but 'emerges' on its own as a result of building competence via

comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1985, p.2) and “when the filter is ‘down’ and comprehensible input is presented and comprehended, acquisition is inevitable. It is, in fact, unavoidable and cannot be prevented” (Krashen, 1985, p.4), have made him easy to challenge. McLaughlin (1978), for instance, approaching the issue from a cognitive psychologist’s point of view, proposed an information-processing approach to language development whereby students can obtain knowledge of a language by thinking through the rules until they become automatic, a view which is quite contrary to the assertions of the Monitor Hypothesis. Gregg (1984, p.94) voiced the criticism that “each of Krashen’s hypotheses is marked by serious flaws”, while Pienemann (for instance Pienemann, 1985; 1989), challenging the claims of the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, postulated that language can be taught and learnt when the learner is ready (Teachability Hypothesis).

In spite of the many challenges, Krashen’s views have been and remain very influential in the language teaching and learning field. Even a harsh critic such as Gregg, who censures Krashen for being “incoherent” and “dogmatic” admits that “he is often right on the important questions” (Gregg, 1984, pp.94-95), and in as far as Krashen (for instance Krashen, 1981) believed that language develops through natural communication, he might be considered one of the driving forces behind the communicative language teaching movement which is in vogue to the present day.

An important theoretical principle underlying the communicative language teaching movement was called “communicative competence” by Hymes (1972). Communicative competence is the ability to use language to convey and interpret

meaning, and it was later divided by Canale and Swain (1980) into four separate components: *grammatical competence* (which relates to the learner's knowledge of the vocabulary, phonology and rules of the language), *discourse competence* (which relates to the learner's ability to connect utterances into a meaningful whole), *sociolinguistic competence* (which relates to the learner's ability to use language appropriately) and *strategic competence* (which relates to a learner's ability to employ strategies to compensate for imperfect knowledge). Another cornerstone of communicative language teaching theory is the belief that how language functions is more important than knowledge of form or structure.

The concept of the communicative functions of language promoted by Wilkins (1976) has had a strong influence on contemporary language learning programmes and textbooks. Other well-known figures in the field have consolidated and extended the theories of communicative language teaching. Widdowson, for instance, believes that by using a communicative approach language can be developed incidentally, as a by-product of using it (1978), and that "knowing will emerge from doing" (1991, p.160), while Littlewood (1981) stresses the need to give learners extensive opportunities to use the target language for real communicative purposes, and believes that the ability to communicate effectively is more important than perfect mastery.

Although "the communicative approach implicitly encourages learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning" (Oxford *et al*, 1989, p.33), typically the emphasis in the communicative language movement, as in previous methods and

approaches, has been on how teachers teach, with relatively little attention paid to how learners learn. Even today, when the communicative approach underlies a substantial number of syllabuses for speakers of other languages, and in spite of insights from a now considerable body of research, it is unusual to find textbooks which include learning strategies in their material. A rare exception is *Blueprint* (Abbs and Freebairn, 1991), and even in this series, the space dedicated to learning strategies consists of no more than a paragraph at the end of each section. Other less widely adopted language teaching and learning methods and approaches include, among others, situational language teaching (whereby grammar and vocabulary are practised through situations), the natural method (which emphasizes natural acquisition rather than formal grammar study), the direct method (which uses only the target language), the total physical response method (which stresses the importance of motor activity), the silent way (which encourages the teacher to be silent as much as possible) and suggestopedia (which attempts to harness the influence of suggestion, such as music or art, on human behaviour).

It would probably be fair to say that to a greater or lesser extent all of these various methods and approaches have had some influence on the contemporary language learning and teaching field which has tended in recent years to move away from dogmatic positions of “right” or “wrong” and to become much more eclectic in its attitudes and willing to recognise the potential merits of a wide variety of possible methods and approaches, as noted by writers such as Larsen-Freeman (1987) and Tarone and Yule (1989). In line with this modern interest in eclecticism, educators are becoming increasingly interested in the contribution made by the learners themselves in the

teaching/learning partnership. Awareness has been slowly growing for some time that “*any learning is an active process*” (Rivers, 1983, p.134. Author’s italics), and the idea that language learners are individuals who can take charge of their own learning and achieve autonomy by the use of learning strategies has been researched and promoted by educators such as Oxford (1990), O’Malley and Chamot (1990), Bialystok (1991), Cohen (1991), Wenden (1991), and Green and Oxford (1995).

There are several important theoretical assumptions which underlie contemporary ideas on language learning strategies. To comment that some students are more successful at learning language than others is, of course, to do no more than state the obvious. Language learning strategy theory postulates that, other things being equal, at least part of this differential success rate is attributable to the varying strategies which different learners bring to the task. From this perspective, which views students as being able to consciously influence their own learning, the learning of language becomes a cognitive process similar in many ways to any other kind of learning (McLaughlin, 1978). It is a view diametrically opposed to Krashen’s Monitor and Acquisition/Learning Hypotheses (Krashen, 1976; 1977) which state that language cannot be consciously learnt but only acquired through natural communication and therefore, by implication, that conscious learning strategies are not useful in the development of language.

With the exception of the Monitor and Acquisition/Learning Hypotheses, language learning strategy theory operates comfortably alongside most of the contemporary language learning and teaching theories and fits easily with a wide variety

of different methods and approaches. For instance, memory and cognitive strategies are involved in the development of vocabulary and grammar knowledge on which the grammar-translation method depends. Memory and cognitive strategies can be involved to make the patterning of automatic responses characteristic of the audio-lingual method more effective. Learning from errors (developed from interlanguage theory) involves cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Compensation and social strategies can easily be assimilated into communicative competence theory and the communicative language teaching approach. Methods such as suggestopedia involve affective strategies. The fact that learning strategy theory can work so easily alongside other theories, methods and approaches means that it has the potential to be a valuable component of contemporary eclectic syllabuses.

2.5 Methodological Issues

It may be that previous reported findings are true for at least some less effective learners. It is likely that second language learners who are less successful are not all just alike in their uses of learning strategies. Some of these learners might be very limited in the number and quality of their strategies, others might be unaware or out of touch, and still others might use large numbers of strategies that lack coherence.

Logically, individuals will apply different strategies depending on their personality, cognitive style, and the task at hand. But although cultural and ethnic background, personality, gender, language learning purpose, and other factors influence the degree to which and the way in which learners use specific strategies, all these types of strategies are important to effective language learning (Oxford and Crookall, 1989).

Thus, it is suggested that an understanding and awareness of learner strategies on the part of both teacher and students may provide valuable insights into the process of language learning. This, in turn, may enable individual learners to adopt or further develop a range of effective personal language learning strategies, and encourage teachers to incorporate their active use in class. Finally, as Oxford (1990) put it, “strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence”.

Most of the prior researches showed significant differences between male and female in the use of strategies, with women’s overall dominance in frequency and range of the strategies. Oxford (1993) mentioned the factors undoubtedly influencing the choice of learning strategies: motivation, gender, cultural background, type of task, age and L2 stage, and learning style. But she proposed that another factor – L2 strategy training – can also have a powerful effect on the choice of strategies.

The findings with the previous studies in this area of language learning strategies are both consistent and inconsistent. It is consistent in that all the studies have revealed that males and females use different strategies toward their foreign language learning with females employing more frequently some of the strategies, for example, the findings by Ok (2003), Dreyer and Oxford (1996), Oxford et. al. (1996) and Kaylani (1996). However, the different pattern and frequency of strategies use by gender in Liu’s (2004) study from those revealed in the previous studies may be affected by other variables such as ethnic background, cultural background, language learning environment, etc.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

A better view to conceptualize the perceived learning strategies is derived from Oxford (1990) strategy system (Diagram 3.1) that sets clearer perspectives from which learning strategies are examined through the students' gender and school level. They consisted of six main strategy groups and nineteen sub-strategies. Oxford (1990) develops a six-item group of L2 learning behaviors, in which not only affective and social strategies are treated and valued respectively, but cognitive strategies are dealt with in three smaller parts, which are memory-related, general cognitive and compensatory strategies.

As shown in Figure 3.2, 163 male and 162 female students are chosen to participate in this study. Each group composes of the upper and lower form students in the school. The upper forms are students from Form 4 and Form 5 whereas the latter are students from Form 1, 2, and 3. These students are required to fill out the SILL version 7.0 developed by Oxford (1990). Finally, the results from the questionnaires will show the perceived language learning strategies used by students in secondary schools are either completely formed by variables such as gender and school level or otherwise. Therefore, their choices of strategies will devote insight of seeing the students as individuals – able of accessing and utilizing comprehensive resources, rather than just being information processors. At the same time, it also enhances the potential aspects of the learners to become more efficient in utilizing the strategies for their language learning irrespective of their gender, school level, or even age group.

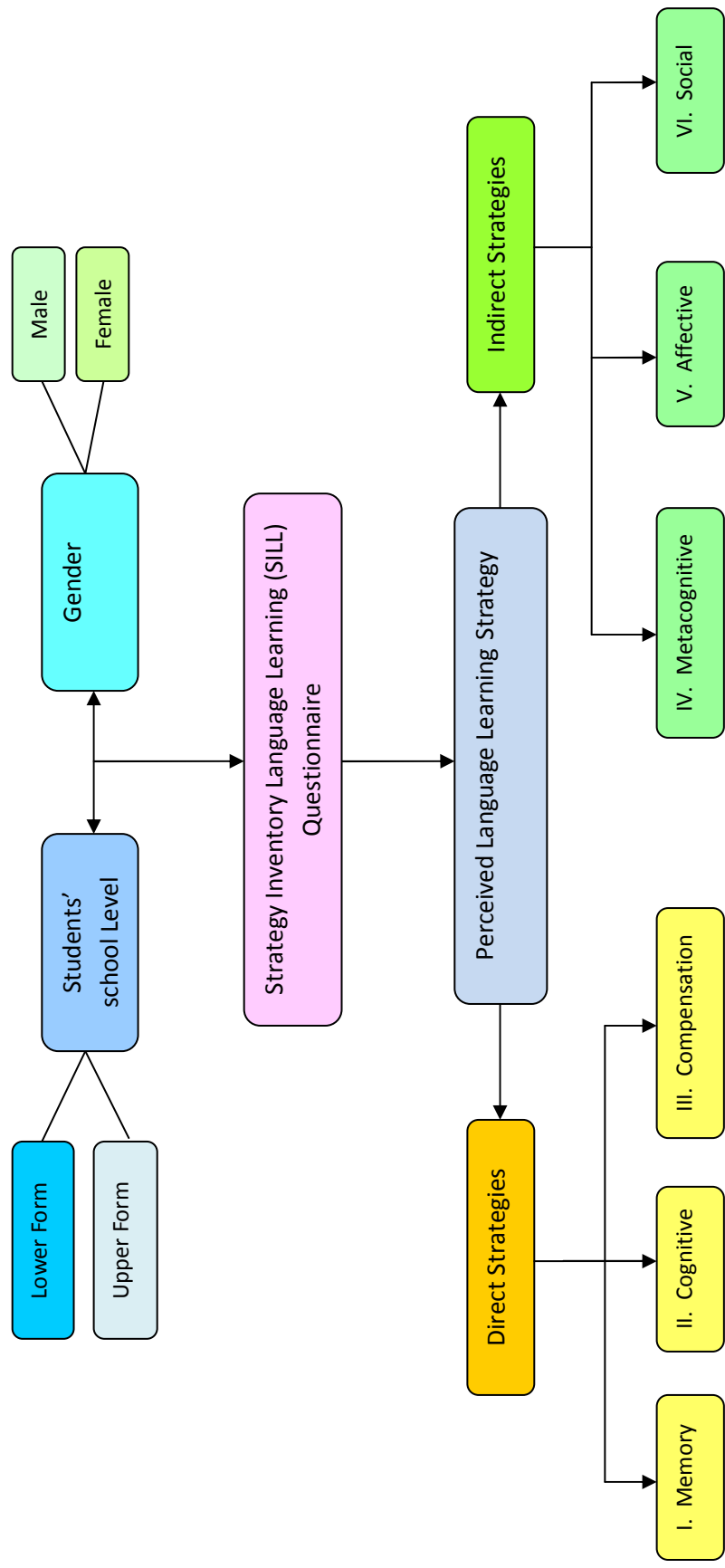


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

Summary

To recap, researches on this language learning theory, supports the effectiveness of using the language learning strategies and has shown that successful language learners often use strategies in an orchestrated fashion. Some findings are

- (i) use of appropriate language learning often results in improved proficiency or achievement overall or in specific skill areas (Oxford et. al., 1993; Thompson and Rubin, 1993);
- (ii) successful language learners tend to select strategies that work well together in a highly orchestrated way, tailored to the requirements of the language task (Chamot and Kupper, 1989). These learners can easily explain the strategies they use and why they employ them (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990);
- (iii) certain strategies or clusters of strategies are linked to particular language skills or tasks. For example, second language writing, benefits from the learning strategies of planning, or self-monitoring, deduction and substitution. Second language speaking demands strategies such as risk-taking, paraphrasing, circumlocution, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. Second language listening comprehension gains from strategies of elaboration, inferencing, selective attention and self-monitoring while reading comprehension uses strategies like reading aloud, guessing, deduction and summarizing (Chamot and Kupper, 1989).
- (iv) the powerful social and affective strategies are found less often in second language research. This is, perhaps because these behaviours are not studied

frequently by the second language researches and because learners are not familiar with paying attention to their own feelings and social relationships as part of the second language learning process (Oxford, 1990).

Apart from the results that shows the effectiveness of language learning strategies, Oxford (1990a) synthesized existing research on how several factors can influence the choice of strategies used among students learning a second language. Among the several few, she has noted that gender, age and second language level are the coexisting variables that play important roles in affecting the students' performance. For instance, 'gender' tends to landslide to the female being reported greater overall strategy use than male in many studies although sometimes males surpassed females in the use of a particular strategy. 'Age and second language level' account for students of different ages and stages of second language learning used different strategies, with certain strategies often employed by older and more advanced students.

Hence, it is based on the theory of language learning strategies that this present research proposes to account for. Past and present studies on language learning strategies have impart various findings and results that show numerous educational implications in relation to the learners' learning background and goals.

In summation, this chapter has reviewed valuable data, investigations and findings about the language learning strategy used among ESL or EFL students from past researches. They have also presented a wealth of information on the role of gender and proficiency on learners' strategy used. However, "a study, no matter how carefully

conducted, cannot be taken as conclusive. It is only with repeated investigation that the complexities of an area can be truly appreciated and comprehended” (Gardner, 1985). Therefore, it is hoped that the present study can also help to explain some valuable information and solutions in discovering the goodness of the second language learning strategies perceived by suburban secondary schools students.