

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Firstly, this final chapter will give a brief account of the problem, the methodology and also the results of the study concerning the perceived use of language learning strategy among the students in a suburban secondary school. The researcher will primarily focus to the summary of the main findings in Chapter Four. This will lead to the second part of the chapter which will thoroughly identify and interpret the findings as to why such results could occur by making comparisons to the possible findings of previous research based on the study's objectives and research questions. Towards the end, the researcher will also examine the educational implications of the findings and explore directions for future research which could facilitate the language learning strategy development for students in rural schools.

5.1 Introduction

The problem of this study arises from the curiosity of the researcher to find out whether if it is possible to conclude that students in suburban secondary school generally perceived the same or exact language learning studies. Therefore, the objectives of the present study are to investigate if there is any significance difference in the types of

language learning strategy perceived among the upper and lower secondary male and female school students. Based on that, research questions are formulated and the answers are sought out using the strategy inventory for Language Learning (SILL) from 325 samples representing a rural secondary school in Betong of which 163 were the upper form students (Form 4 & 5) and 162 were the lower form students (Form 1, 2 & 3). Data collected was analyzed using independent t-test and one-way analysis of variance between groups (ANOVA) with post-hoc Tukey test.

Briefly reviewed, quantitative results have shown that generally the suburban secondary school students preferred the metacognitive strategies the most, followed by social strategies, cognitive strategies, affective strategies, memory strategies and the compensation strategies as the least favourite. Results have also identified that there is no significant difference in the use of the language learning strategy among the upper form male students as compared to the opposite gender. The upper secondary female students have disclosed results showing that there is a significant difference in the use of memory strategies. However, the lower secondary female students revealed results that showed significant difference in the use of memory, compensation and metacognitive strategies. The male students in the lower forms meanwhile revealed a statistical significant difference in their use of compensation strategies.

The overall results among the secondary school students have identified no significant difference in the use of direct and indirect language learning strategy.

Memory strategies are a favourite among the Form 1 female students whereas cognitive strategies are best used among the Form 4 male students. Form 5 female students highly use the compensation strategies but metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies are famously used among the Form 3 female students.

5.2 Discussions

Generally, the findings as shown in Table 4.1, shows that the students in suburban secondary school perceived all the six types of learning strategy in their English Language classroom. Apparently, the researcher has found that the students do utilize the learning strategy to improve, develop and progress in their language learning ability. This is noted in the result that shows the students have intentionally use the strategies that could turn their knowledge into better proficient skills in self-efficacy language learning environment (Green & Oxford (1995); Dansereau (1985); O'Malley & Chamot (1990); Oxford (1990); and Weinstein & Mayer (1986)). Besides, the overall result has also proven that the students are selective in using the strategies involved as the ranking varies for each of the learning strategy.

Metacognitive strategies were mediumly preferred by students as opposed to findings done by Yu (2003), and Griffiths & Parr (1999) which discovered that non-English majors and Asian students preferred compensation strategies more. This finding is therefore, definitely consistent with studies done by Nisbet (2002), and Han & Lin (2000) in China that explain the students need metacognitive strategies in order to become more successful language learners through orchestrating their own capability in

terms of forming, functioning and reforming of language learning and acquisition. However, it is also interesting to note that the secondary students in suburban school least preferred the compensation strategies. The researcher has found out that these students care less to comprehend or guess unknown words in English language classroom. The fact is that in suburban areas, students are less exposed to a richer language need environment. They are more closely knitted to a community where English language forms and functions are rarely used in spoken language, hence the L2 communication opportunity are lesser and risk taking is not high staked.

Another intriguing fact noticed, is that students in suburban secondary school preferred the social strategies as their second best. This finding is congruent to Politzer (1983) finding's which shows that Hispanic choose more of social interactive strategies. But at the same time, it also differs when Politzer (1983) continued to mention that, Asian students pick more on rote memorization strategies. In the researcher's opinion, the suburban students knew the limitations and constraints of acquiring the second language where their mother tongue is spoken daily. Hence, they will primarily use their metacognitive strategies to regulate their thinking skills to apprehend social strategies to work with their peers in language classroom learning, for example, by inquiring, asking and seeking information, posing questions orally, culturally aware of team work, cooperative and collaborative learning in order to make their meanings be clearly understood. Cohen (1990) and Oxford (1989) also stated that successful language learners employ social strategies to convey their meanings and be comprehended by others.

Cognitive, affective and memory strategies follow suit after social strategies. This shows that the suburban secondary school students are able to stack up information in long term memory, assimilate and accommodate the knowledge in a procedural way (O'Malley et. al (1985) and Oxford (1990)). In the researcher's opinion, once information is being able to be directly taken note of, the students take control of their own learning so that they able to retrieve their previous knowledge and utilize the content in another new language learning context.

5.2.1 Research Question 1

Is there a significant difference in the types of language learning strategy used among the upper secondary male students in a suburban school?

According to the summary findings shown in Table 4.26, there is no significant difference in all the types of language learning strategy used among the Form 4 and Form 5 male students. However, summarization of the findings in Table 4.28 indicates that the upper level male students use language learning strategy more often than the Form 4 male students except for cognitive strategies. It is prominent that the higher the proficiency level, the more competent a learner becomes as the learner becomes more aware of using a wider variety of strategies to improve his language proficiency and accomplishment (Oxford, 1996; Bialystok's 1981; Oxford and Nyikos, 1989; Ehrman and Oxford, 1989; Dreyer and Oxford, 1986; and Wharton, 1976). This finding might imply that academic atmosphere in Form 4 language classroom is not as active and as stimulating in Form 5 classes.

From the researcher's point of view, the Form 4 male students are more concerned with individual learning as subjects for such as Additional Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Economics, Accountancy and English for Science and Technology (EST) are alien to them. They need time to disseminate the new input and be culturally adapted to the new knowledge. They also need the time to be able to assimilate and manipulate language learning as proficient as their senior peers. In a way, their intellectual exchanges in these new subjects influence the classroom behavior in terms of their way of thinking. Hence, this supports Chamot et. al. (1987) discovery that the use of cognitive strategies decreases and other strategies increase in language learning once the students have reached an upper level

5.2.2 Research Question 2

Is there a significant difference in the types of language learning strategy used among the upper secondary female students in a suburban school?

Findings of this research work concluded that there is no significant difference in the types of language learning strategy used among the upper secondary female students in a suburban school *except for memory strategies* (Table 4.26). The intensity of using memory strategies by the Form 4 female students is higher than that of the Form 5 female students (Table 4.28). The difference is very significant with the level of significance $p = 0.48$. Though memory strategies are ranked as the least favourite strategy, the Form 4 female students resort more to rote learning as compared to the intensity of using compensation strategies used among the Form 5 female students.

In the researcher's view, the female students welcome the technique of creating mental images and being able to apply them when learning new concepts. Unlike the male students in Form 4, instead of cognitively thinking the ways to integrate new input, they perceived memory strategies in order to counterattack the new language input introduced in the upper forms. This finding proves that Asian students still employ memory strategies as their powerful tool in encountering new language rules (Politzer and McGroarty, 1985; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Politzer, 1983; Politzer and McGroarty, 1985; Oxford, 1992; and Foh and Fung, 1997).

Though using memory strategies might not be effective for contextual learning; it is also fascinating to take note that as the female students move on to a higher school level, they develop an interest in using compensation strategies to overcome their knowledge limitations in their target language. This finding is close to the findings of Land and Oxford (2003) which found that Taiwan sixth grade students preferred compensation strategies the most. Some research findings outside the second language field show that competent learners use compensation strategies such as guessing and inferencing (Brown et. al. 1983 in Oxford 1993). At a higher secondary school level, the female students begin to develop an educational behavior that will make them willing to take risk in studying and to be more active. To the researcher's point of view, risk taking in learning a language is very important. This kind of behavior will also strengthen the students' strategic competence which will be very useful for learning a language.

5.2.3 Research Question 3

Is there a significant difference in the types of language learning strategy used among the lower secondary male students in a suburban school?

Findings of this study confirm that there is no significant difference in the types of language learning strategy used among the lower secondary male students in a suburban school *except for compensation strategies*. The frequency of using the compensation strategies among the male students in the lower form increases as they progress to their next school level (Table 4.28: Form 1 = 2.44; Form 2 = 2.77 and Form 3 = 2.84). Initially, the male students favour compensation strategies the least among all the other strategies used. It shows that they are confident of using other strategies instead of making intelligent guesses to complete a language task. However, as they move on to a higher level, the intensity of using the compensation strategies becomes more apparent as they discover making intellectual guesses could also help them become a more competent student. This finding is congruent to a study done by Sarjit Kaur and Salaisah (1998) when they discovered that Malay students at a tertiary institute favor compensation and affective strategies to other strategies. Nambiar (1998), Davis and Abas (1991) and Nuril Huda (1998) also found out that Malay students in Indonesia tended to use compensation because they were not proficient in the English language and preferred to guess their answers. This is very true because the significant difference in the use of compensation strategies among the male students in the lower forms may also be related to their English proficiency.

Compensation strategies belong to direct strategies (Oxford, 1990) which involve more production of concrete details of the target language such as practice of language form and the reworking of the learning materials. Some basic features of compensation strategies are using mother tongue, asking someone for help by hesitating so that the person or teacher may provide the missing expression in the target language, using gestures or avoiding communication partially or totally when difficulties are anticipated. Less proficient learners need these compensatory strategies more because they run into knowledge roadblocks more often than learners who are more proficient in the target language. Therefore, the study's result tells us that the lower secondary male students in suburban schools are not proficient English learners. They are still lacking of vocabulary and enough language knowledge. In order to reach the aims of communication, they have to use compensation strategies.

Hence, the researcher thinks that it is only natural for students at a lower school level to make greater use of the compensation strategies as these can allow them to guess the meaning of what they have heard or read or to remain in the conversation despite their limited grammatical and vocabulary knowledge. Even findings of studies performed by Chang (1990), Yang (1993a), and Watanabe (1990) showed that the compensation category was the highest ranking category on junior college students from various ethnic backgrounds.

5.2.4 Research Question 4

Is there a significant difference in the types of language learning strategy used among the lower secondary female students in a suburban school?

Statistical result tabulated in Table 4.26 shows that there is no significant difference in the types of language learning strategy used among the lower secondary female students in a suburban school *except for memory, compensation and metacognitive strategies*. There is a slight difference in the use of compensation strategies by the female students but the difference is not as significant as in metacognitive strategies. The students' intensity in the use of these strategies is biggest in Form 3 (M = 4.03) as compared to Form 1 (M = 3.84) and Form 2 (M = 3.62). These differences, actually have some relationship with the students' status taking the *Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR)* in Form 3 whereby the English Language subject becomes the most prominent subject in deciding their success and failure in the public exam. The researcher has in particular view that the high use of the metacognitive strategies found among the female students in the lower form seems to confirm that successful language learners seek the ability to manage their own language learning process and seizing every opportunity that could keep them on the right track when the subject becomes crucial in determining their future success. This is very true as studies related to successful language learners show strong evidences on the use of metacognitive strategies in language classrooms (Nisbet (2002), Han and Lin (2000), and Liu (2004)).

In another view, the researcher believes that as the female students become more confident in employing executive control over their language learning in progressing to

become more proficient, the use of memory strategy decrease slightly (Form 1: $M = 3.10$ and Form 2: $M = 2.73$). As the accumulation of language input becomes more solid, they begin to utilize other learning strategies in their language activities such as affective and social strategies. This finding is therefore consistent with studies done by Yu (2003), Griffiths and Parr (1999) where they found out the non-English major students prefer memory strategies the least. The present finding has also been able to contradict previous studies done on students with Asian background (O'Malley and Chamot (1990); Kaylani (1996); Bedell and Oxfords (1996); Dryer and Oxford (1996); Bremmer (1999); Shmais (2003) and Griffiths and Pars (1999)). However, as the female students gets into Form 3, the use of memory strategies increases in frequency ($M = 3.01$) even though it is the least in favour. This implies that the rote learning behavior has become their cultural habit in studying. Although the English Language syllabus system emphasize much on the application of Communicative Approach, the lack of authentic communicative environment in the students' real life context makes the students retreat to utilize memory strategies as another route to bear in mind the forms and functions of the target language. It is perhaps disheartening to say this is where the Communicative Approach trips off in its implementation in second language classroom. A teacher maybe providing the best language authenticity in the learning environment but it is not enough if language is not being culturally enriched beyond the classroom situation.

The Form 3 female students also exhibit the highest use of other strategies such as the affective strategies and social strategies. This finding is congruent to studies done by Politzer (1983), Ehrman and Oxford (1989), Oxford and Nyikos (1989), and Liu's (2004)

in favour of female learners using the two strategies. One contributing factor that should be taken note of is that the Form 3 female students could be more technology savvy. Information Communication and Technology Literacy (ICTL) was first introduced to the lower forms four years ago in the school. The development of computer, multimedia and networking technologies could attribute to the students' high usage of social strategies which has increased students' exposure to foreign cultures and more English input. In a way, the exposure might have led these Form 3 female students to be more open and are more capable of controlling their emotions in network communication.

As Oxford (1990) identified, social strategies are higher order strategies that show significant effects not only in use of cooperative learning, asking questions, but also in use of higher-level cognitive strategies, more language practice opportunities and greater use of different language functions. The use of social strategies can be identified as a kind of demonstration of higher proficiency by users. In this way, some social strategies tend to be used by learners who are competent enough in the target language. This could be proved by the study of Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006), which showed that the most frequently used strategies for the advanced group were social strategies. From this study, the researcher can imply that although the Form 3 female students have learned ICTL for less than five years, they are competent and confident enough to communicate in English, especially in social context.

However, there is still much less research done on social and affective strategies in general. This limitation may help explain why social and affective strategies are far less frequently found. It is also possible that learners are not familiar with paying attention to their own feeling and social relationships as part of the L2 learning process (Oxford 1990). Therefore, further research should be conducted to find out whether this is the real cause of strategies preference.

5.3 Rundown

Generally, all the secondary school students in the present study show no significant difference in their use of direct and indirect strategies. They perceived the language learning strategy at medium frequency in all of the school levels. The use of memory, compensation and cognitive strategies are less favourable among the students as they prefer to contribute indirectly to language learning.

5.3.1 Gender Differences

Overall, the male students in both school levels (upper and lower forms) seemed to use lesser learning strategies as compared to their counterparts. The females in both secondary levels have shown a vibrant use of various strategies such as highly employing metacognitive, affective memory, compensation and social strategies (Table 4.28) in learning the second language. In conclusion, female students in suburban schools use almost all of the language learning strategy more frequently and effectively than the male students such as previewing the lesson, remembering sentence structures, taking notes

frequently, deducing the language rules, frequently use synonyms to replace unknown words and can guess to understand unfamiliar English words or what others will say next in the conversation. The suburban school in the present study, it is a known fact that females generally do better in English than males. This may be related to the awareness of the female students in utilizing certain learning strategies in their second language classrooms than the male students. Besides, females are more active in using learning strategies to get effective learning and they are more stable than males in attitude and learning motivation. They are more mature in physical and psychological development and are also willing to work hard along while the males are more indulgent in sports and games.

5.3.2 School Level

As for the differences among upper and lower school levels, students use learning strategies less frequently as they go into higher grades (as shown in Table 4.28). This result is somewhat surprising and confusing. In our normal opinion, with students becoming more physically and psychologically mature, they should use learning strategies more often. However, it is not the case in this study. The reason for this may be due to the great pressure of *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) examination that the upper form students have face in order to gain entrance to a higher institution or tertiary education. In Form 1, 2 and 3, teachers usually teach according to the materials given in the textbook. The textbook provides a lot of new knowledge and interesting passages and dialogues. In teaching, teachers always have enough time to make class more attractive to students by designing or organizing some activities. Through taking part in activities,

students become more active in learning the language and have more chance to communicate with each other in English either in class or out of class. However, in Form 5, teachers usually give students piles of exercises and tests in preparation for SPM examination. Students just do exercises or tests mechanically while teachers just explain the answers boringly. Under the great pressure of the coming examination, teachers are unwilling to spare time to instruct strategy use to the students and students have no chance to practice their strategy use in their daily learning. The examination-oriented teaching may explain why the senior students in suburban schools use learning strategies less frequently when they reach Form 5.

5.4 Implications

The findings of the study indicate that secondary school students in both upper and lower forms use the English language learning strategies at a medium level. This should arouse the teachers' attention especially for those servicing in suburban or rural schools around Sarawak because many researches have proved that strategy use is closely related to students' performance. O'Malley & Chamot (1990) indicated that most students could benefit from the teaching of learning strategies. Therefore, teachers, especially in secondary schools, ought to increase students' awareness of strategy use and combine strategy training with their daily teaching so as to help their students improve their English performance or proficiency.

The study also reveals that senior high school students use compensation strategies least frequently. In fact, compensation strategies have a significant correlation

with English performance and are an important part of the learning process. Therefore, teachers should attach importance to them and create English learning atmosphere that could motivate students to be able to make intellectual guesses; instill confidence in students' inferiority to take risk to overcome their learning limitation in the language skills and hence, cultivate their communicative ability by training them to use compensation strategies appropriately.

From the study, it can also be seen that female students are more able to focus their attention, take notes frequently, deduce the language rules and have clear goals for learning English, while males are not likely to concentrate on their studies and are always naughty, impatient and restless, and are more physically hyperactive in sports and games. In this case, teachers should try their best to make male students know the importance of using language learning strategy and encourage them to practice using them appropriately so as to improve their English learning results.

Differences in using learning strategies also exist in lower and upper forms in secondary schools in suburban areas. The means of most individual strategies descend as students move to higher grades. Students in Form 5 have less enthusiasm and interest in learning English in the boring exercising-and-checking lesson when faced with the tense national public examination. Therefore, in order to facilitate English learning, teachers should take some measures to make the class a "happy class" to increase students' interest and relax their tired brain by instructing some strategies useful for their learning.

Learning strategies can assist students in promoting their own achievement in language proficiency (Green and Oxford, 1995; O'Malley et al, 1985; Oxford, 1990).

As a whole, through the researcher's personal teaching experience, teachers will not be able to teach all the language skills that students will need in the future. Consequently, it is important for English teachers to believe that effective strategy use can determine a student's success. As Wenden (1985) pointed out, learner strategies are the key element to learner autonomy, and thus one of the most teaching goals is to facilitate autonomous learning. Besides, it has been found that students can benefit from the strategies-based instruction (MacIntyre & Noels 1996). To facilitate autonomous learning, training in learning strategies could, therefore, be one of the teaching goals in an English classroom in suburban schools throughout Sarawak.

Initially, teachers can provide strategy instruction by offering examples of how they have used strategies for similar language tasks. After explaining a strategy, the teacher can then explain the purpose and importance of the strategy. They may explicitly discuss why and when a strategy might be used and could work better than the other. Explicit instruction in strategies can make students use the learned strategy more frequently and more effectively, help them become better language learners, help them add strategies to their repertoire of learning tools, make them more aware of the strategies available to them and encourage them to decide which strategies are most effective for particular tasks (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary & Robbins, 1999).

Next, once a few strategies have been introduced, instruction should emphasize the coordination of strategies. The teacher can explain the importance of having a repertoire of strategies for language learning. Students can be reminded that different strategies can work for the same task and that good learners plan, monitor, problem-solve and evaluate recursively during a given task (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary & Robbins, 1999).

Then, encouraging students to talk about their thought processes helps make them more aware of the strategies they are already using. This awareness is important because it enables them to call on those strategies whenever they face challenging tasks. Finally, these learning strategies should be practiced in different learning tasks. Only through practice will students become more familiar with these learning strategies.

As a conclusion, teachers should regard strategy training as an integral part of regular class routine rather than a supplementary activity because teachers are the key agents in increasing students' awareness of learning strategies.

5.5 Limitations

The target number of the students employ in this quantitative study is quite small (325 students) in proportion and is only based on one suburban school in Saratok district – when there are more than five secondary schools that could be engaged by the researcher for the present study. In addition, the school level is only constraint until the Form 5 level whereas the other surrounding schools offer their school level until Form 6. Hence,

it is not certain that the sample matches the target population (all suburban secondary school students) on every variable of interest. Besides, the sample is not only limited in terms of the geographical region but it also does not involve all the secondary school level; and therefore, demographic profile of the samples such as their different educational and socioeconomic background is not efficiently represented.

5.6 Recommendation

In the light of the study, the following recommendations can be put into practice in order to improve the perceived use of language learning strategy among secondary school students:

1. The language learning strategies in general should be taught to language learners so that they can better exploit them while they are learning a language. The researcher believes making the teachers aware of these strategies through explicit or implicit training during classroom teaching would be beneficial. Hence, it is also advisable for each language teacher to detect the language learning strategy perceived by their students and help them compensate the missing areas in their strategy preference and use.
2. Although communicative language teaching was suggested to be used in the national school syllabus, the application of that approach still faces many problems up to date because of the various ethnic personality, background, beliefs and culture in our country. A lame production of the Communicative Approach is the “Malingish”, that is a distortion of the English Language being translated from

the *Bahasa Melayu* colloquial form of communication. Students from rural and suburban areas are being hit hard by this approach as their schools are in the remote and interior regions where authentic environment for second language communication practice are very rare except for the limited time in their language classrooms. Therefore, the researcher feels that it is high time for the Education Ministry and Curriculum Development Centre to lookup and do rigorous research on a fresher and more inclusive approach that could cater to the need of the new “1 Malaysia” concept.

3. It is very, very rare indeed to find any textbook that tells how learning strategy could be taught, learnt or acquired. Even if there are any, it could have been materialized within three or four pages. It would be a delight if future studies are keen to work on the creation of modules detailing the concept and the operation of how, what, where, when, why and which learning strategies could cater to the best benefit of the teachers and the students.

Conclusion

This study has revealed the general pattern of language learning strategy perceived by secondary students in accordance to their gender and school level in a suburban school. The secondary school students perceived metacognitive strategies as the most favourite and memory strategies the least. They were also in favour of using the indirect strategies than direct strategies for language learning. The female students use strategies more such as memory, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies as compared to

the male students who comfortably perceived compensation strategies as their best use strategies. Hence, this present study has found out that there is no significant difference in the language learning strategy used among upper secondary male students as compared to the female students in the upper forms which shows an exceptional significant difference detected in the use of memory strategies. Likewise, there are significant differences in the use of memory, compensation and metacognitive strategies among the female in the lower forms while there is only a significant difference in the use of compensation strategies among the male students in the lower form. As for the differences in school level, the higher school level the students are in, the less frequently they use learning strategies. As researches and studies in the field of language learning strategies show us, learning strategy use is closely related to the students' academic performance and teachers can assist the language learning process by promoting language learning strategy awareness and use. Therefore, teachers in senior high schools and universities should pay special attention to the use of language learning strategies among students and train them to use strategies that are beneficial for them on the basis of the differences in their characters. Only by combining strategy instruction with the teaching content appropriately can teachers achieve satisfactory teaching results.