

Language Learning Strategies Used By Successful English as a Second Language (ESL) Learners among Primary School Students

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Abstract—Studies have disclosed that a greater awareness of strategy use among students exert higher influence on learners' language proficiency. Since the result of English in the recent assessment for level two pupils was not promising, so, the purpose of this study is to identify the language learning strategies employed by successful language learners, in class and out of the class settings. Data for the study was collected using a survey questionnaire with 10 notable level 2 ESL learners in a school located in one of the states in East Malaysia and 10 outstanding learners who were the former students of the school. The instrument used in this study was based on the Strategy Questionnaire Model developed by Mohamed Amin Embi (2000) which consists of 30 statements concerning the use of language learning strategies in class and out of class settings. Data was analysed using descriptive and inferential analysis. The findings revealed that the successful language learners used to answer questions, have the courage to speak English and favoured learning English through songs. It also revealed that the learners used more in class strategies compared to out of class strategies. This study also discusses the implications for school administrators, educators and parents in assisting the children on how to use language learning strategies effectively that could enhance their proficiency in English.

Keywords— *Language learning strategies, successful language learners, in class learning strategies, out of class learning strategies*

I. INTRODUCTION

Passive learners are the learners who may quietly absorb information and knowledge but they don't keen to apply what they know or have learnt. According to a 2009 presentation from leadership development firm Lominger, 60% of people are passive learners and only 10% are active learners. The data illustrates a fair share of passive learners in level two in a school in east Malaysia who had contributed to the drop of the quality of the English result in recent March test as well as their speaking skill tested during the classroom-based assessment.

Since kindergarten, the students have been exposed to English as a second language, yet their proficiency level are still low. According to Hazita (2016), generally, Malaysian students were incompetent to attain a reasonable level of proficiency. More than 50% of the students who had completed six years of primary education were illiterate in the English language as per data reported in 2013. In the current years, it becomes critical concerning graduate unemployment, when 56% is cited to have low English proficiency and thus being

the main reasons for not getting the job. Consequently, this condition could jeopardize the realization of Vision 2020 - the nations' aspirations to be competitive in the development and economy. In order to achieve vision 2020, it is decisive for the students to know how to learn the language in the most effective ways. Fatin and Parilah (2017) stated that there were researchers conducted studies on the successful language learners for secondary and tertiary level learners in the West Malaysia but less attention given to the primary school learners in the East Malaysia. Nor Hashimah et al. (2013) highlighted that learning English would become easy if the students endeavour worthy learning strategies in understanding the language. They also concluded that the failure of the students to adopt the learning strategies is one of the reasons of not mastering the second language. Rubin (1975) proposed teachers to help struggle students improve their performance using the learner strategies which seen as productive.

By identifying language learning strategies employed by successful language learners in class and out-of-the class settings would provide some insights to the school administrators, educators, parents and other students on how these successful learners learn English language. In fact, the school administrators and teachers can plan interventions to instill good learning habits among the students and raise their English Language proficiency levels that aligned to CEFR standard. Parents can also play role by guiding their children at home using the strategies highlighted. This study investigates language learning strategies employed by successful language learners in a school located in East Malaysia.

This study was structured based on the following research questions.

- 1) *What are the language learning strategies used in class and out of the class settings by the successful English language learners?*
- 2) *Which language learning settings is highly used by the successful language learners?*
- 3) *Is there a significant difference in the use of the language learning strategies due to gender?*
- 4) *Is there a significant difference between years of language learning by the learners in class and out-of-class settings?*

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Language Learning Strategies

Hardan (2013) highlighted that since 1970s language learning strategies have received a substantial amount of significance due to the pivotal role they are playing in language learning. Furthermore, the language learning strategies were defined differently by many scholars based on how the learners used them to deal with the information they receive and the kind of strategies they use. Some strategies are said to give the ultimate benefit, yet some others are ineffective. In Rubin's (1975, p.43) early definition, he defined strategies as "the techniques or devices that a learner may use to acquire knowledge". Rigney (1978, cited in Saranraj L et. al 2016) defined learning strategies as procedure that facilitates acquisition, retention, retrieval, and performance. Oxford, Lavine, and Crookall (1989, cited in Hardan 2013) have the same ideas as Rigney (1978) about language learning strategies. Wenden (1987a, cited in Chien Kuo Lee 2010) defined it from the aspect of language learning behaviours. This involve regulating the meaning of a second or foreign language, cognitive theory, learners' strategic knowledge of language learning, and the affective view like motivation, attitude and etc. All these points are said to be able to improve language learning. O'Malley and Chamot (1990, cited in Pezhman Zare, 2012) illustrated it as special thoughts or behaviour that individuals use to help them learn, comprehend, or keep new information. Later Rubin (1987, cited in Hardan 2013) defined it as behaviours, steps, or techniques that learners pertain to facilitate language learning. Hence, language learning strategies are seen as the efforts that learners adopt to make their learning meaningful. Maintaining the Integrity of the Specifications.

B. Successful Language Learners

Second language and foreign language acquisition are considered advantages to some people who are able to learn them without much hassle. This had inspired early studies on characteristics of successful language learners which investigated good language learners. As mentioned earlier Rubin (1975) was one of the pioneers who recognized the strategies on the language learning. She observed and identified the strategies used by good language learner. Among the characteristics of good language learners are "a willing and accurate guesser" (p. 45) and "prepared to attend to form" (p. 47). Good language learners implement and observe their own and the speech of others (Juyeon & Michael 2016). Other prominent researchers were Naiman et. al. (1975) outdo (Rubin, 1975), by drawing up ten strategies of good L2 learners. He believed that the good language learner is distinguished by a personal learning style or positive learning strategies, and active approach to the learning task (Griffiths 2004). Hamdani (2015, cited in Mulyadi 2018) asserted that by identifying the way learners learn has enable the teacher to design appropriate teaching techniques that suit individual learner. Undoubtedly, this would render more successful language learners.

C. Language Learning Strategies in class and out of the class settings

Language learning strategies in class refers to the ways that language learners use the target language in the classroom

whilst language learning strategies out of the class refers to the ways that they use the target language as a whole outside of the classroom. Marlyna and Noor Saazai (2016) indicated the out of the class language activities such as watching movies, reading newspaper, surfing the Internet, talking to friends or native speakers, listening to radio, and etcetera that are done outside of formal classroom. Many studies cite research done by Pickard (1996), the earliest studies that address out-of-class language learning strategies. The study of 20 German-speaking students studying English in their secondary school resulted that they prefer activities that interest them rather than those recommended by the teacher. The most chosen activities were reading and listening. Therefore, they were towards the receptive skills compared to the productive skills. The pattern is parallel in studies by Pearson (2004), Hyland (2004) and Ihsan (2012). In Malaysia, Mohamed (2000) developed Strategy Questionnaire (SQ) looking at language learning in three conditions: in-class, out-of-class and test preparation. Using the said SQ, Raihana and Parilah (2017) reported that their study on 80 good ESL learners from four different primary schools in Labuan had showed high frequency strategies used on songs, movies, and TV programmes. Hence, it is also inclined towards receptive skill and highlighted the out-of-class language learning can enhance language learning.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants of the study were 10 respondents comprising of Year 4, 5 and 6 (level 2) students of a school located in East Malaysia, whose age ranges from 10 to 12 years old and another 10 respondents were the students of the school before whose age ranges from 13 to 14 years old. The first 10 set of respondents chosen were based on the purposive sampling with moderate performing learners with grade C and B as their best grade in the recent school assessments while the second set of respondents were identified based on their excellent UPSR results where 6 of the respondents got A's in their English paper(s) in the national examination in 2018 and 2017. All the 20 respondents were also being observed as active learners in class and out of the class. These respondents have been learning English as a second language for five to eight years. The feedbacks from the respondents in the survey were the main source of information used in the analysis so that the objective of this study can be achieved.

B. Instruments

In this study, the instruments used include a background information questionnaire and a Language Learning Strategy Use Questionnaire developed by Mohamed Amin Embi (2000). Fatin and Parilah (2017) claimed that the questionnaire has a strong reliability level as the Cronbach alpha coefficient is 0.87. The questionnaire was used to find out what successful English Language learners do in the classroom and out of the classroom. There were two sections questionnaire containing statements. The first section consisted of two parts, A and B. The statements in the first section in Part A covered the strategies used in the classroom (15 items) and part B covered the strategies used outside the classroom (15 items). A 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4 is used in this study; (1) Never True of me, (2) Seldom True of me, (3) Sometimes True of me and (4) Always True of me. The second section comprised of

demographic questions related to gender and years of learning English.

C. Data Analysis

The data was coded and analysed using the Statistic package for Social Science (IBM SPSS Statistic version 22).

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The means for 'learners like to answer questions silently' and 'learners try to be brave to speak English in class' were 3.70 each which was the highest mean results. The least that the learners did were 'reading textbook before the lesson' and 'doing exercises in the textbook or workbook beforehand' with the means of 2.80 each. The finding is consistent with previous work by Takeuchi (2003) who identified among others, successful language learners is mentally active learners, observes language comprehension and production and practices communicating in the language. Green and Oxford (1995) mentioned more successful students used strategies for active involvement more often than did less successful learners.

In out of class setting, learners learn English through songs gained the highest mean of 3.55. Other prominent strategies with mean 3.35 each were asking for repetition if they could not understand what someone was saying, looked up for words they didn't understand in a dictionary and they read novels or storybooks to enhance their English. The strategies used by the successful language learners are not something that are difficult to practice, in fact these strategies have always been mentioned by English teachers for students to master the language. Hence, from the data analysis, the strategies used by the successful language learners are, nonetheless to whom the teacher ask a question, students have to put effort to think for the answer, try to be brave to speak the language, always volunteer to answer questions in class, listen to English songs, have the courage to ask people to repeat what they say, look up for difficult words in dictionary and read novels or storybooks to improve the language. These have answered the first research question.

A paired sample t-test was conducted to identify which language learning settings is highly used by the learners. There was a statically significant difference in means used in class ($M=3.183$, $SD=0.325$) to the mean used in out of class setting ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 4.14$), $t(19) = 5.77$, $P < 0.05$. The mean decrease was 0.313 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.1997 to 0.427.

The independent t-test reveals that there is no significant difference for language learning strategies used by the successful language learners for both in class $t(18) = -1.498$, $p = 0.152$ and out of class settings $t(18) = -1.485$, $p = 0.634$ between male and female.

Analysis of variances showed that the effect of the number of years of learning English on language learning used by the learners in class $F(1,18) = 0.410$, $p = 0.530$ and out of class settings $F(1,18) = 0.317$, $p = 0.580$ were not significant too.

V. IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

The results show that the successful language learners in this study used language learning strategies in class that allow them to interact with others in class rather than reading

something on their own. These may due to the lack of support in speaking the language at home as not many family members are capable of speaking the language. Thus, school is the place where the learners would put effort to practice communicates using the target language with their teachers and friends. On that account, teachers must provide the English-speaking environment as to support the students speaking using the language. For out-of-class language learning strategies, the learners cherished much on learning English through songs. This item of receptive skill is the preference not only to respondents in Malaysia but to other countries as well (Pickard 1996, Hyland 2004 and Pearson 2004). Since the school located quite far from the town, to attend private tuition is the least strategy that the learners would do.

Besides identifying the highly used strategies by the successful language learners, this study allowed the teachers to understand that the learners practice using the language in class settings more than out of class setting. This was proven with the statically significant result derived from the paired t-test. Hence, teachers are proposed to incorporate Language Learning Strategy Instruction into their daily language lesson (Kinoshita, 2003). This will expose the students with in the class learning strategies employed by the successful language learners which the students could acquire and practice the strategies in learning the language before it becomes second nature. Finally, the findings also revealed that there was no difference in terms of language learning strategies used by gender and years of learning the language in both language learning settings. These findings are consistent with Griffiths (2003) who claimed there was no statistically significant differences according to either gender or age with strategy use.

This study of identifying language learning strategies employed by successful language learners in class and out of the class settings would provide some insights to the school administrators, educators, parents and other students on how these successful learners learn English language. In fact, the school administrators and teachers can plan interventions to instill good learning habits among the students and raise their English Language proficiency levels that measure using CEFR as a yardstick. Parents can also play role by guiding and support their children at home using the out of class strategies highlighted.

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