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An Investigation into English Language Learning Strategies Employed by the Second-year Students at Thai Nguyen University of Information and Communication Technology

Dang Phuong Mai^{*a}, Nguyen Quynh Trang^b, Duong Cong Dat^c

^aTNU-University of Information and Communication Technology,
Z115 Street, Quyet Thang Ward, Thai Nguyen City, Vietnam

^bTNU-University of Medicine and Pharmacy
284 Luong Ngoc Quyen, Thai Nguyen City, Vietnam

^cTNU-University of Education
20 Luong Ngoc Quyen, Thai Nguyen City, Vietnam

*Corresponding Author: phuongmaidang1234@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the learning strategies employed by the students at Thai Nguyen University of Information and Communication Technology, and to examine the differences in the students' use of English language learning strategies according to their English proficiency. A total of 200 second-year students from the Department of Information Technology (IT) were selected as the participants of the study. All the participants learned English as a compulsory academic subject. The data collection instruments of the study were questionnaires adapted from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990) and interviews. The responses were interpreted through statistical analysis in terms of mean and standard deviation. The major findings of the study showed that the second-year students at ICTU were medium users of overall learning strategies. It was also found that the students used metacognitive strategies most frequently and memory ones least frequently. Additionally, the results of an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) indicated that there were significant differences in the use of learning strategies such as memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social strategies among different proficient students, but no significant differences were found in their use of compensation strategies and affective strategies. The results proved that the second-year ICTU students were medium users of strategies. The category of metacognitive strategies was most frequently used whereas the one of memory strategies was least frequently used among the second-year ICTU students. However, there were some individual strategies under or above the medium use level. Thus, the use of each individual learning strategy was not always corresponding to the use of the whole strategy category to which they belonged. Language proficiency had effects on the overall strategy use, especially significant differences in the four categories of strategy: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and social strategies.

Keywords: ICTU, SILL, language learning strategies, language proficiency, memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies

Introduction

In accordance with the current trend of integration and globalization, English has become an international mean of communication with people from every region of the world. English has been used in almost all aspects of life such as politics, business, culture, education etc. Due to its importance, English is taught as a foreign language or a second language at all levels of educational system of countries world-wide. In the field of English language teaching, an abundance of research has been done to explore the issues of language learning in general and English learning in particular.

Actually, there have been many studies on language learning strategies employed by learners of English as a second language or foreign language, as well as the relation between learners' English proficiency and learners' strategy choice. The term "language learning strategies" here can be interpreted by Oxford (2002, p.124) as "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills." In this sense, language learning strategies enable learners effectively to self-direct their language proficiency development. The term "language proficiency", also known as "linguistic proficiency" refers to the ability of an individual to speak or perform in an acquired language. Eventually, the results of the previous studies on language learning strategies affirmed that learners do use a variety of strategies in the procedure of English language learning and the extent of their use is not too low. Particularly, using language learning strategies has been indispensable when learning environments are more likely to transfer to problem solving with difficult tasks that require learners to seek for effective ways to get the new input. However, learning strategies used by particular proficient learners in particular learning contexts are obviously different.

In the educational system of Vietnam, English is the most common foreign language which is required for almost every student at all education levels. English has always been selected as one of the six compulsory tests of the national graduation examination of high school students. Nevertheless, most of Vietnamese students learn English with the aim of overcoming the examinations, not satisfying working requirements in the future. Therefore, few students are assumed to be able to determine what English language learning strategies are and how these strategies can help improve their English proficiency. The shortage of understanding about language learning strategies partly makes it difficult for students to become good English learners at higher education. Following a 2012 investigation of Ho Chi Minh City Department of Science and Technology, a half of university graduates do not meet the requirements of English language skills and only 3% of Vietnamese students have got the international English certificates.

It can be seen that the importance of teaching and learning language learning strategies is not identified adequately in Vietnam. Although a number of studies on language learning strategy use have been early implemented by Vietnamese researchers, none of them has been done at Thai Nguyen University (TNU), a center of education and training in the Northern mountainous and midland area of Vietnam. Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct a study on English language learning strategies employed by students at Thai Nguyen University of Information and Communication Technology which is one of the 10 key institutions of TNU. The university aims to train students as productive engineers by providing them with modern and fertile knowledge and skills in the areas of information technology, communication technology, electronics and telecommunication, and information system. Apart from emphasizing on specialized fields, English is likewise appreciated

by ICTU administrators because of its importance in asserting the ability of each student in future career opportunities. The university administrators always offer English courses as compulsory part of the curriculum as required by the Ministry of Education and Training.

As a result, the current study focuses on finding out the frequency of English language learning strategies employed by the second-year students at ICTU and the possible link between their strategy use and language proficiency which was measured by GPAs, a calculation of a student's academic achievement at college or university, and self-evaluation. From the findings of the study, the further studies will be done to help students develop appropriate strategies in their language learning.

The study is conducted with the purpose to answer two research questions below:

1. What English language learning strategies are frequently employed by the second-year students at ICTU?
2. What are the differences in the students' use of English language learning strategies due to language proficiency as measured by their GPAs and self-evaluation?

Literature Review

When identifying language learning strategies, it can be seen that different researchers relied on different terms to refer to the strategies. For example, Wenden and Rubin (1987) used the term "learner strategies", Oxford (1990) used the term "language learning strategies", and Chamot (2004) used the term "learning strategies".

In terms of "learner strategies", Wenden and Rubin (1987) were the beginners who made a discussion on "good language learners." They supposed that researching about good language learners would help to understand more about language learning. Basing on classroom observation, Rubin first discovered seven strategies that seemed to characterize "good" learning behaviors: 1) making reasoned guesses when not sure; 2) making an effort to communicate and to learn through communication; 3) finding strategies for overcoming inhibitions in target language interaction; 4) practicing the language whenever possible; 5) monitoring their speech and that of others; 6) attending to form and 7) paying attention to meaning.

According to Chamot (2004, p.15), "learning strategies are for the most part unobservable, though some may be associated with an observable behavior." She made a sample that a learner could use *selective attention* (unobservable) to focus on the main ideas while listening to a newscast and could then decide to *take notes* (observable) in order to remember the information. In almost all learning contexts, the only way to find out whether students are using learning strategies while engaged in a language task is to ask them. The instructional applications of the tools that researchers have used to identify language learning strategies are especially valuable for teachers who wish to discover their students' current learning strategies before beginning to teach learning strategies. For example, teachers can require students to complete a language task, and then lead a classroom discussion of how students complete the task and point out the learning strategies that students mention.

Previously, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) distinguished between the concepts of learning and learner strategies. These concepts depend on natural more than institutionalized settings for their implementation and the degree of explicitness has also to be taken into consideration:

We use the term learner strategies to identify strategies that students have developed on their own to solve language learning problems...We contrast this

term with learning strategies, which we use to describe the strategies that have been ... taught explicitly as part of instruction in both first and second language contexts. (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p.371)

These identifications above show that language learning strategies are mostly characterized by the influential factors related to language learning process, learners and teachers. Among them, Oxford's model has been more studied in the following research studies.

In the current EFL learning context today, language learning strategies are applied by learners almost every time in language class. To complete listening, speaking, reading or writing tasks, the learners use different types of language learning strategies, such as cognitive, metacognitive, social, affective etc. However, not all language learners can be successful in selecting appropriate strategies to accomplish their task. Therefore, it is essential for learners to get strategy instructions in their language learning as a way to improve their language performance.

Before conducting an abundance of research regarding the effectiveness of language learning strategy instruction, the researchers have provided different ways to identify strategy instruction. The term "strategy instruction" involves the way of teaching students about strategies, teaching them how and when to use strategies, helping students identify personally effective strategies, and encouraging them to make strategic behavior in their learning schema. Accordingly, Kinoshita (2003) defined language learning strategy instruction as a teaching approach that aims to raise learner awareness of learning strategies and provide learners with systematic practice, reinforcement and self-monitoring of their strategy use while attending to language learning activities. Language learning strategy instruction can be integrated into language lessons in order to help students understand and learn new concepts or skills, even in a variety of settings. In the past, strategy instruction was supposed to be effective for students who have struggle with developing strategies for learning and remembering on their own. Nevertheless, nearly every student currently can benefit from understanding the strategies with the support from teachers. Teachers play a crucial role in guiding and directing students to use particular learning strategies until the students can learn more effectively and become independent learners.

To satisfy the purposes of the current study, the researcher especially referred to the previous studies carried out by Yang (2010), Al-Buainain (2010), and Abu Radwan (2011). These studies not only investigated language learning strategy preference of university students but also examined the relationship between language learning strategy use and the two other variables, gender and language proficiency. However, in all the studies, language proficiency, not gender, was found to have a close relationship with students' strategy use.

In 2010, Yang conducted a study to examine which English learning strategies are frequently used by EFL Korean university students, and discover the differences in the use of English learning strategies by self-evaluated language proficiency and gender. A demographic questionnaire and Oxford's SILL were delivered to 288 students at Gyeong-Sang National University. The findings indicated that Korean university students used a medium range of strategies. Compensation strategies were used most frequently whereas memory strategies were used least frequently among Korean university learners. As regards the effect of language proficiency levels on strategy use, the results indicated that there was a significant difference among three proficiency levels (high, intermediate, and beginning). Actually, language proficiency had significant effects on the overall strategy use, the six categories of

strategy, and individual strategy use items. In the use of six strategy categories, higher proficiency learners reported using metacognitive strategies most while intermediate and lower proficiency groups of learners preferred to use compensation strategies most. All three proficiency levels of learners considered memory strategies as their least favor in language learning.

Apart from the studies reported above, there have been a number of investigations into language learning strategies implemented by Vietnamese researchers. In Vietnam, the research on the field of language learning strategy was launched in the early of the 1990s. In this current study, the studies conducted by Le Thanh Hoang (1999) and Mai Lan Anh (2010) were reviewed.

Le Thanh Hoang (1999) designed a study to determine the use of language learning strategies of different groups of learners in Hue City. Each groups of learners consisted of 20 participants. Group 1 included 20 tenth-grade school pupils who learned general English. Group 2 was composed of 20 first-year students who major in both English and Russian at Hue University of Pedagogy. Group 3 had 20 second-year medical students who studied general English at Hue University of Medicine. Group 4 contained 20 third- and fourth-year students of English at Hue College of Sciences and Hue University of Pedagogy. The researcher made an investigation through questionnaires, interviews and class observations. The study found that there was a high correlation between the degree of frequency and degree of usefulness of each strategy; the strategy use was different from one group to another and from one language task to another; there were some similarities in the strategy use of the four groups of learners; the learners' attitude affected learning strategy choice; and most learners attended a training course in language learning strategies.

Mai Lan Anh (2010) carried out a study to discover the relationship between students' types of motivation and the use of language learning strategies among the second- year non-English majors at HNUE. In order to measure the participants' level of motivation to study English as a foreign language, the study administered the motivation scale created by Chang (2005) (as cited in Mai Lan Anh, 2010). In addition, a modified version of Oxford's (1990) SILL was employed to investigate the subjects' use of language learning strategies. The results of the study showed that the two most commonly adopted by the students were evaluating and planning strategies. Cognitive and functional practice strategies were reported to be least frequently used. Moreover, the results also concluded that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation had positive and significant correlation with the use of language learning strategy. The students with stronger motivation were supposed to employ more learning strategies than learners with less motivation.

It was found that the studies conducted in Vietnam in the field of language learning strategies did use a common design of research, a quantitative research. Most of the studies concentrated to find out the use of language learning strategies of learners in various contexts or to consider the use of language learning strategies in a relationship with students' factors, such as motivation, age, gender ect. Besides, there are several studies seeking for the effects of metacognitive or cognitive strategies on students' language performance. In terms of research methodology, the information for the data analysis was mostly collected by the questionnaires, interviews or class observations in which the questionnaires are the most frequent research instrument. All the form and the content of the questionnaires used in these studies were taken or adopted from the SILL devised by Oxford (1990).

Methodology

Questionnaires

By administering a questionnaire to a group of people, the researcher is able to “collect a huge amount of information in less than an hour, and the personal investment required will be a fraction of what would have been needed for, say, interviewing the same number of people” (Dörnyei, 2000, p.6). Using questionnaires for students in the current survey, the researcher aimed to elicit the frequency of the students’ self-reported strategy use by allowing them to show their own judgment.

Accordingly, two parts of the questionnaire were built. Part I seeks for students’ background information and Part II checks students’ English learning strategy use (Appendix A). The closed-ended questions which allow students to give a short/single-word answer or choose an option on the Linkert scale were permitted in the questionnaire.

Interviews

To support for the investigation of the subjects’ learning strategy use, structured interviews were administered in this study. The structured interviews are very popular among researchers of language teaching and learning.

To fulfill the aims of the study, the researcher decided to launch the questionnaire survey among 200 second-year students of the Department of IT at ICTU, and 24 of them was chosen to participate in the interview later. All the subjects ranged between 20 and 25 in age. They finished three courses of English Basic in the first three semesters of their academic study and were taking an ESP course at the time of conducting the study. Thus, the subjects were supposed have background knowledge of four English skills as well as English language for their major. In addition, they seemed to become more mature in their awareness of the importance of English to their future career.

Results and Discussions

Results and Discussion of the Questionnaires

Use of overall strategies and six strategy categories by the second-year ICTU students. As discussed above, a variety of research studies on language learning strategies has employed Oxford’s (1990) SILL which bases on 5-point Likert scale in order to calculate the mean score of the participants’ responses. This section presents two findings to answer the first question: “Which language learning strategies are frequently employed by the second-year ICTU students?”

Use of overall strategies by the second-year ICTU students

Initially, the average score of the whole participants’ response was interpreted to find out the overall language learning strategies that ICTU students utilized. As suggested in Table 4.4, 31.3% of the participants responded with 4 or 5 for the strategy use (“4. *usually true of me*” = 26.04% or “5. *always or almost always true of me*” = 5.26%). In other words, the second-year ICTU students certainly demonstrated moderate use of English language learning strategies.

Table 1

The subjects' responses to the overall strategy use (N=200)

How true of you the statement is	Number of responses	Percentage (%)
1. Never or almost never true of me	368	3.68
2. Usually not true of me	2225	22.25
3. Somewhat true of me	4277	42.77
4. Usually true of me	2604	26.04
5. Always or almost always true of me	526	5.26

Table 1 shows the subjects' response to the strategy use in each of six categories across the entire SILL. It can be said that the subjects did use all the six strategy categories in their English language learning. Although the usage levels of the six strategy categories were different in one way or another, all their mean frequency fell within the range of 2.83 - 3.39. On average, the mean score of the subjects' response was approximately 3.1, which indicated that they used each strategy category at medium frequency. These results were consistent with the findings reported previously, which also reflected the students' moderate strategy use by the numbers of subjects responding 4 or 5 for a strategy.

Table 2

The subjects' responses to the use of the six strategy categories (N=200)

Strategy Category	Total score of each strategy category	M	SD	Rank order of the usage
A: Memory	5092	2.83	.868	6
B: Cognitive	8098	2.89	.884	5
C: Compensation	3808	3.17	.930	3
D: Metacognitive	6098	3.39	.841	1
E: Affective	3640	3.03	.994	4
F: Social	3968	3.31	.851	2

Use of each individual strategy by the second-year ICTU students

Table 3 indicates the means and standard deviations of memory strategies (items 1 to 9). Medium strategy use was shown in all the category with the exception of two low-use strategy items, item 4 "*I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used*" ($M = 2.48$, $SD = .868$), and item 6 "*I use flashcards to remember*" ($M = 2.45$, $SD = .781$). None of the strategies in memory category was found to be in high use.

Table 3

Most frequently used strategies: Means and Standard deviations

Item	Strategy	M	SD	Use	Rank
Meta4	33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	3.71	.842	H	1 st
Meta3	32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.		.825		
Com1	24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	3.61	.895	H	2 nd
Soc3	47. I practice English with other students.		.831		
Cog1	10. I say or write new English words several times.	3.56	.900	H	3 rd

Meta2	31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	3.48	.783	M	4 th
Soc1	45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.		.808		
Com6	29. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	3.37	.858	M	5 th
Meta5	34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	3.35	.685	M	6 th
Meta6	35. I look for people I can talk to in English.		.950		
Soc2	46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	3.32	.849	M	7 th
Meta9	38. I think about my progress in learning English.		.811		
Com2	25. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	3.31	.926	M	8 th
Meta1	30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	3.29	.900	M	9 th
Mem8	8. I review English lessons often.	3.28	.909	M	10 th

* *Mem* = *Memory strategies*; *Cog* = *Cognitive strategies*; *Com* = *Compensation strategies*; *Meta* = *Metacognitive strategies*; *Affe* = *Affective strategies*; *Soc* = *Social strategies*.

Table 3 presents the most frequently used strategies in which there were five strategies in high use and nine other strategies in medium use. The most preferred strategy was Meta4 “*I try to find out how to be a better learner of English*” (item 33). The mean of this strategy is 3.71 which indicated that the second-year ICTU students usually sought for better ways to study English. Thus, the students’ awareness in English learning was affirmed to be higher and more serious than ever. The second most frequently used strategies were Meta3 “*I pay attention when someone is speaking English*” (item 32) and “*To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses*” (item 24). The mean of the second highest preferred strategies is 3.61. The third strategy used was Soc3 and Cog1, “*I practice English with other students*” (item 47) and “*I say or write new English words several times*” (item 10). The mean of these two strategies is 3.56 which were also considered as high strategy usage. Therefore, it can be said that metacognitive strategies ranked most positions in the number of the most frequently used strategies.

Table 4

Least frequently used strategies: Means and Standard deviations

Item	Strategy	M	SD	Use	Rank
Cog13	22. I try not to translate word-for-word.	2.41	.983	L	1 st
Mem6	6. I use flashcards to remember new English words.	2.45	.781	L	2 nd
Cog10	19. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	2.46	.856	L	3 rd
Mem4	4. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	2.48	.868	L	4 th
Affe5	43. I write own my feelings in a language learning diary.	2.49	.924	L	5 th
Cog7	16. I read for pleasure in English.	2.58	.725	M	6 th

Cog2	11. I try to talk like native English speakers.	2.60	.851	M	7 th
Cog8	17. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	2.67	.764	M	8 th
Com4	27. I read English without looking up every new word.	2.72	.920	M	9 th
Mem7	7. I physically act out new English words.	2.73	.813	M	10 th

* *Mem* = *Memory strategies*; *Cog* = *Cognitive strategies*; *Com* = *Compensation strategies*; *Meta* = *Metacognitive strategies*; *Affe* = *Affective strategies*; *Soc* = *Social strategies*.

Table 4 describes the least frequently used learning strategies in which there were five strategies in low usage and nine other strategies in medium usage. The strategy ranked the least frequently used one was Cog13 “*I try not to translate word-for-word*” (item 22). The mean 2.41 showed that most of the subjects did not translate into English or Vietnamese word by word. The second least used strategy was Mem6 “*I use flashcards to remember new English words*” (item 6). The mean of this strategy is 2.45 which indicated that the strategy was sometimes used by the students. The third least frequently used strategy belonged to cognitive category, “*I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English*” (item 19). The results showed that cognitive strategies were found to take most positions in the number of the lowest preferred strategies.

It can be concluded that the lowest preferred strategies such as cognitive ones did not always belong to the strategy category which was least frequently used (memory category). Besides, all strategies used were in medium used strategy categories; however, some of them were in low use level ($M < 2.5$) such as item 22, 6, 19, 4, and 43, and some were in high use level ($M > 3.5$) such as item 33, 32 and 24.

Difference in the use of English language learning strategies by the second-year ICTU students due to language proficiency

The students' language proficiency has been measured in strategy research in multitude of ways such as language proficiency achievement tests (Channarong, 2000), duration of study in English (Shmais, 2004; Al-Buainain, 2010), self-ratings of English proficiency and university average in English course (Al-Buainain, 2010; Abu Radwan, 2011). In this study, language proficiency was examined as reflected by two individual variables: GPAs and Self-evaluation. The following sections present the results which are relevant to the second question: “What are the differences in the students' use of English language learning strategies due to language proficiency as measured by their GPAs and self-evaluation?”

Use of strategies by the second-year ICTU students due to language proficiency as measured by their GPAs The second-year students of ICTU were classified into five groups according to their GPAs (advanced, good, fair, poor and failed). However, none of the participants failed in English examination in the previous semester. Table 5 indicated that the students at every proficiency level preferred to use metacognitive strategies most. The least frequently strategies used by advanced students were cognitive and affective strategies ($M = 3.12$, SD Cognitive = .829, SD Affective = .798). To the students at good, fair and poor proficiency level, memory strategies were used least (Level B: $M = 2.94$, $SD = .869$; Level C: $M = 2.84$, $SD = .856$; Level D: $M = 2.63$, $SD = .859$).

Table 5

Means and Standard deviations of six categories of strategy use according to GPAs

Proficiency level	Level A (N=8)		Level B (N=56)		Level C (N=90)		Level D (N=46)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Memory	3.19	.781	2.94	.869	2.84	.856	2.63	.859
Cognitive	3.12	.829	3.05	.887	2.89	.864	2.65	.871
Compensation	3.54	.713	3.20	.871	3.16	.935	3.11	1.021
Metacognitive	4.17	.650	3.53	.829	3.31	.771	3.23	.919
Affective	3.12	1.024	3.02	1.016	3.06	.988	2.99	.972
Social	3.71	.798	3.37	.800	3.30	.827	3.18	.936

* *Grade Point Average: A= Excellent (Advanced), B = Good, C = Average (Fair), D = Below Average (Poor); N= number of respondents*

Use of strategies by the second-year ICTU students due to language proficiency as measured by their self-evaluation

Table 5 presented that metacognitive strategies were employed most at all three self-evaluated levels (High level: M = 3.79; Intermediate level: M = 3.42; Beginning level: M = 3.14). The high proficient students tended to use affective strategies least (M = 2.90) while both the intermediate and beginning students were least interested in memory strategies (Intermediate level: M = 2.88; Beginning level: M = 2.55).

Results and Discussions of the Oral Interviews

In the structured interviews applied for this study, the researcher had a specific set of questions which were responded by the respondents after completing the questionnaire survey. The information obtained in the interviews was uniformly provided with the aim of checking the reliability of the data collected from the questionnaires. The interview questions were delivered to 24 participants of the study.

The first seven questions (Section I) aim to get the general information of the interviewees on their name, age, academic major, time of English study, English language proficiency, and foreign languages. It was affirmed that all the students taking part in the interviews were present in the questionnaire survey and provided adequate information about themselves as required. It was a fact that most of the interviewees were rather modest when being asked about their language proficiency upon GPAs or self-evaluation. By checking the participants' responses carefully in both research instruments, the researcher concluded that the background information of the subjects was completely accurate and reliable. No difference was found in the students' background information between the results of the two research instruments.

Section II of the interview deal with the frequency of each strategy which the subjects use in their language learning. All the 50 statements of the questionnaires were selected and investigated for this purpose. They were delivered into six sub-groups (Group A, Group B, Group C, Group D, Group E, and Group F); therefore, the researcher could check against the responses to all the items of the questionnaires. As stated, each group of the interviewees (G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, and G6) needed to reconfirm their responses to one set of questions. As a result, the interviewees' responses were mostly in line with strategies they reported in the questionnaires. Most of the strategies reported in the interviews could be found in moderate frequency use as reflected in the results of the questionnaires. However, there were four interviewees in

G1, G3, and G4 giving more opposite answers to their questionnaires. Before the researchers asked them twice, it was apparent that they could not understand sufficiently all the questions. After checking the final answers of these interviewees, a similarity was found in their responses; however, the interviews took more time-consuming. Particularly, the strategies in high and low frequency level which were reported focused on the followings.

With regard to high frequently reported strategies, most of the interviewees stated that they “usually” found the ways to learn English better. In class, they also asked for the teachers’ advice or other study mates’ help in learning activities, for example working in group for doing an English project or assignment, asking partners to make something clearer or raising the questions in English to each other. Besides, many of the students usually looked for opportunities or enjoyed English clubs or language camps to communicate in English. They also started setting up a time table for English learning every week. Moreover, most of the students when being asked reported that they often thought of their own way to study English such as enjoying games, working in team, learning by observation and even joining online course for the purposes of both talking and studying. With unknown words, concepts or terms, they usually used the strategies of guessing often; and with new words, they wrote them down several times and learnt by heart until they could remember these new words. The students frequently paid attention to their weaknesses in learning English in need of improvement. They specially noticed the mistakes for better performance the following time.

In respect of low frequently reported strategies, it was found that the students did not usually or even never talk to native speakers. Additionally, some skills which required the students to use English such as such as reading newspaper or journals in English, expressing opinions in English or writing down the feelings in English in daily diary, etc. made it difficult for the students to implement regularly. These strategies proved that the students’ response to the strategy use in the interviews was corresponding to those in the questionnaires.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The results of the current study reported the real situation of English learning strategies applied by the second-year ICTU students. Hence, the findings could help the teachers understand their students’ English leaning strategy preference, build an effective plan for strategy training in their English teaching class, raise the students’ awareness of the use of language learning strategies, encourage the students to construct and adjust their strategies, and organize the suitable activities for practicing English learning strategies.

Firstly, the results provided a forthright view on how frequently ICTU students used English learning strategies in their language class. As mentioned, the students employed a medium preference of overall strategies in which metacognitive strategies were most frequently used and memory strategies were least frequently used. Obviously, the use of each strategy category as well as each strategy over six categories was not always similar. Therefore, it is necessary for both the teachers and students to acknowledge the students’ strategy preference in order to determine the students’ strengths and weaknesses in English learning. The teachers are absolutely able to decide if there was a need for providing the students with more opportunities to employ strategies and which type of strategies are suitable for particular learning activities. Moreover, being aware of using strategies may help the students become

more independent and flexible in applying task-appropriate strategies to enhance the effectiveness of their learning.

Secondly, the study indicated that the second-year ICTU students at all proficiency levels did use strategies in their English learning but a part of them were not adequately aware of the strategies that might be most beneficial to employ. The findings proved that more proficient students applied a wider range of strategies in a greater number of situations than less proficient students did. Thus, the pedagogical implication here is that less successful language learners can be assisted to improve their language efficiency through learner training or strategy training. Certainly, English language teachers must spend much more time and effort to increase strategies used by less successful language learners, especially beginning students. To promote the students' understanding of language learning strategies, the teachers are suggested to open a forum on learning strategies that would be helpful for different proficient students to share with and learn from each other.

Truthfully, language learning strategies are teachable (Oxford, 1990). Thus, if the teachers attempt to teach students to use learning strategies through strategy instruction, they are able to be aware of the students' learning styles and strategies. That is important in assessing the students' use of strategies as well. Besides, the other objective of delivering strategy instruction is to enable students to become more cognizant of their preferred learning strategies. Accordingly, they can be more competent at using learning strategies and more proficient in the language.

Practical actions need to be taken by the teachers in language classrooms in order to take explicit and implicit strategy instructions into the regular lessons. As suggested above, the teachers are capable to fulfill their overall students' needs with different learning strategies and meet peculiar expectations of the students who possess different learning styles, motivations, strategy preferences, etc. However, to achieve the results as perfectly as possible, the teachers should have an adequate knowledge about the students and a sufficient understanding of the course to be taught.

Thirdly, language teachers should have knowledge of the students' background before instruction in the target language. They need to know their students' learning style, gender, age, nationality or ethnicity, beliefs, previous educational, cultural and linguistic experiences, learning goals, and perception towards the teaching method and language curriculum, etc. Undoubtedly, more comprehensive research on a wide range of factors affecting strategy choice would be helpful for the language teachers.

In brief, a number of implications were considered from the results of the study on assessing the second-year ICTU students' use of learning strategies. However, one of the most implications is that the students should be provided with more opportunities to use language learning strategies permanently since the overall strategy use by the participants of the study merely felt in the medium range. The less frequent strategies in this study (memory strategies and cognitive strategies) can form the core of a program of classroom strategy instruction.

This study aimed at examining the learning strategy use of a group of the second-year students studying at Thai Nguyen University of Information and Communication Technology. The first purpose of the study is to investigate the students' overall strategy use, their use of strategy categories and their use of individual strategies; the second one is to discover the significant differences between their use of learning strategies and language proficiency. The study administered the questionnaires adapted from Oxford' (1990) SILL and structured interviews as the data collection instruments.

The results proved that the second-year ICTU students were medium users of strategies. The category of metacognitive strategies was most frequently used whereas the one of memory strategies was least frequently used among the second-year ICTU students. That means all strategies used were in the medium used strategy categories. However, there were some individual strategies under the medium used level ($M < 2.5$) and some above the medium used level ($M > 3.5$). The strategy of the highest frequency use was “*I try to find out how to be a better learner of English*” (metacognitive strategy). Contrarily, the strategy of the lowest frequency was “*I try not to translate word-for-word*” (cognitive strategy). Thus, the use of each individual learning strategy was not always corresponding to the use of the whole strategy category to which they belonged.

As for the effect of language proficiency levels on strategy use, there was a significant difference among the students' proficiency levels. Language proficiency had effects on the overall strategy use, especially significant differences in the four categories of strategy: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and social strategies. Most the proficiency levels of students considered metacognitive strategies as their most favorite ones and memory strategies as their least favorite ones in English language learning.

There is a need for carrying out more research on the effectiveness of strategy instruction on the language learning of learners. Additionally, the influence of cultural background, beliefs, learning style, motivation should be considered by teachers in teaching students learning strategies. As a result, English language teachers or curriculum designers at ICTU in particular and TNU in general can refer to the findings of this research when planning English curriculum.

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