

Language Learning Strategies Use and Challenges Faced by Taiwanese EFL Learners

Global Journal of Social Sciences Studies

Vol. 6, No. 2, 64–72, 2020

e-ISSN: 2518-0614



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ABSTRACT

Because of the effect of the globalization, Taiwanese EFL junior high school students are forced to learn English well in order to pass the senior high school entering exam. This study aimed to investigate the language learning strategy preference of Taiwanese EFL junior high school students, the correlation between language learning strategy and language learning motivation, and the students' reading difficulties. In this research, twenty-five Taiwanese EFL junior high school students are asked to fill out the questionnaires about language learning strategy and language learning motivation. The findings presented Taiwanese EFL junior high school students preferred to use cognitive strategy, metacognitive strategy, and social strategy. The similarities of these three strategies are that students preferred doing more exercises or drills, practicing with peers or native speakers to improve their language learning abilities. On the other hand, the correlation between language learning strategy and language learning motivation is medium. It means if the students make good use of these language learning strategies, it will increase their self-confidence and learning achievement, and stimulate their learning motivation. At the same time, no matter what level of reading achievement the students are, they were lack of vocabulary bank and the background of the grammars and syntax. The application of language learning strategy will not only enhance learning achievement or motivation but also help them build vocabulary bank. Thus, language learning strategy is a significant and useful tool for EFL learners.

Keywords: Language learning strategy, Learning motivation, Learning achievement, Reading difficulty, Vocabulary bank., EFL.

DOI: 10.20448/807.6.2.64.72

Citation | Ching-Ying Lin; Tzu-Wei Huang (2020). Language Learning Strategies Use and Challenges Faced by Taiwanese EFL Learners. Global Journal of Social Sciences Studies, 6(2): 64-72.

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Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

History: Received: 20 March 2020/ Revised: 24 April 2020/ Accepted: 26 May 2020/ Published: 17 June 2020

Publisher: Online Science Publishing

Highlights of this paper

- This study aimed to investigate the language learning strategy preference of Taiwanese EFL junior high school students.
- It revealed the correlation between language learning strategy and language learning motivation, and the students' reading difficulties.
- The application of language learning strategy will not only enhance learning achievement or motivation but also help them build vocabulary bank.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the trend of globalization, English became an international and essential language which most of people all over the world have been used to utilizing. Therefore, to learn English becomes more and more important and necessary for students in Taiwan. Language learning strategies (LLSs) have played a significant and influential part in language learners' learning process. Also, using language learning strategies can help learners increase their learning motivation and achievement. Besides, [Chamorro and Paz \(2016\)](#) indicated language instructors also have interested in investigating their students' learning performance and preference. In Taiwan, however, the junior high school students who view English as a foreign language have difficulty in remembering lots of vocabulary and comprehending the grammars or sentences' structures when they were learning English. Therefore, based on [Scarcella and Oxford \(1992\)](#) proved that language learning strategies are specific behaviors, process or skills used by students to help them learn English. Moreover, in order to pass the senior high school entering English exam, Taiwanese junior high school students still need to remember numerous vocabulary and comprehend the complicated grammars and sentences' structures to help them understand what the articles pointed. Thus, this study would aim at inquiring the junior high students' preference of language learning strategies, their language learning motivation and reading difficulties.

1.1. Problem Statement

[Setiyadi, Sukirlan, and Mahpul \(2016\)](#) found that learners from different cultures may use different ways to learn a foreign language. The students who learned a foreign language in Asian have been manifested to utilize different language learning strategies contrast to the students who learned the same language in Western countries. [Magogwe \(2013\)](#) stated that language learning strategies helped the students to improve their reading ability and stimulate their reading achievement. Also, the researcher found out the students used language learning strategies in the first and second language to increase their reading comprehension. However, [Chimbganda \(2006\)](#) explored one of the major difficulties faced by learners who regarded English as a second language was that students were lack of language learning strategies to improve their reading comprehension when they go to college or university. Therefore, they weren't able to learn English more successfully.

1.2. Research Questions

- 1) What are English reading difficulties among the students of high, mid, and low reading achievement?
- 2) Which learning strategies do the junior high school students use most?
- 3) What's the relationship between learning strategies and learning motivation?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Reading Comprehension

The students can understand the meaning and theme statement of the articles by reading the whole articles. They can answer the questions correlating to the articles or know the structure of the sentences after reading the

articles. Moreover, they even read the articles to help them improve their reading ability and strengthen their reading skills. Therefore, reading comprehension is the process that the students understand what the articles pointed. Simultaneously, the students can also write the same structures of the grammar and even they integrate the vocabulary and grammar which is similar with the articles mentioned. According to [Grasparil and Hernandez \(2015\)](#) said that reading comprehension is a complicated process of meaning construction including word-level and text-level skills. Therefore, though text-level comprehension relies on word-level skills, these skills are not enough. Skillful reading depends on readers' background knowledge and proficient use of comprehension strategies. Thus, the fluent readers employ available cognitive resources, or cognitive capacity, to approach the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. Besides, [Marzban and Davaji \(2015\)](#) also indicated that language learners may comprehend the texts in similar ways but realize differently, or comprehend the texts in a different way but realize similarly. Also, they divided the helpful reading comprehension into six components for the language learners. It concludes literal comprehension, reorganization, inference, prediction, evaluation and personal response. Literal comprehension means that the students can understand the meaning of the texts directly such as vocabulary, dates, times and location. The students need the direct answer to response the questions of the comprehension. Based on literal comprehension may be helpful for the teachers to know whether understood the basic meaning of the texts. Reorganization means that the students can integrate the information which knew before and the knowledge which they know recently. They combined them together into their background knowledge. Inference means that students combined their literal understanding of the texts with their own knowledge of instinct. Prediction means that the students are suggested that they guess the final events and happening of the texts. Evaluation means that in order to answer the comprehension questions of the texts, the students have to give a global or comprehensive decision about some parts of the texts and use a literal understanding of the texts and their knowledge related to the topic or issue. Finally, personal response means that the answers are based on the topic and suggesting understanding of the text.

2.2. Language Learning Strategies

There have been important aspects to define language learning strategies. However, proved that they attempted to concentrate the concept as the series of systematical and significant thoughts that increase the students' reading performance and make their learning better and effective by using the various language learning tasks. [Guapacha Chamorro & Benavidez Paz, Koc \(2017\); Wu and Lin \(2016\)](#) stated that language learning strategies are defined as the specific actions, behavior, techniques, and thoughts used by the students to not only improve their own learning progress in developing foreign language but also enhance learners' performance and make their learning more effective. Consequently, [Oxford \(1990\)](#) found that language learning strategies were divided into two aspects: direct language learning strategies and indirect language learning strategies. On the other hand, direct language learning strategies are also categorized as memory strategy which used to reserve information, cognitive strategy which used to make learning more sensible and profitable and compensation strategy which used to help learners cut down on gaps when knowledge is restricted in the target language. Besides, indirect language learning strategies were categorized as metacognitive strategy which used to inspect and systematize language learning procedures, affective strategy which used to contain learners' emotive occasion, attitude, motivation and values and social strategy which used to raise and support learners to interact and utilize the target language. A number of previous researches have proved that there is an understandable and affirmative connection between language learning strategies usage and successful language learning. Thus, [Naif and Saad](#)

(2017) declared that the suitable utilization of these strategies can make their language learning easier, faster, more effective, and more self-directed.

2.3. English as Foreign Language

Nordquist (2018) indicated English as foreign language is the global mode for the usage or study of the English language by non-native speakers in an English-speaking environment. The environment means people views English as their mother tongue or one where English has a recognized position. Also, English as a foreign language points to specialize ways to English language teaching which is devised for those whose primary language is not English. Fundamentally, based on if they regard English as a native language, we can distribute into countries that English as a second language, or English as a foreign language. The first classification is self-explaining. Inside the country, English has authentic allocated communicative standing. In short, there are 75 zones in which English has a particular status in society. Richard, Platt, and Platt (2007) had separated the English-speaking nations in the world from three spacious varieties, which he represents through building three concentric circles: the interior circle indicated that these countries are the traditional English base, in which it is the primary language, and the exterior and enlarge circle indicated that these countries illustrate the earlier extend of English in non-native issues, where the language is portion of the country's major constitution, where it offers a foreign-language environment in a multilingual society, and the spread circle that his involves territories that symbolize the significance of English as an international language although they do not have colonial history and English does not have particular directive position in these countries. The term "English as Foreign Language" (EFL) has traditionally meant to learners who spoke languages at schools other than English at home. There are lots of inaccurate terms in many cases, because some learners who view English as their third, fourth, fifth, and so on language at schools.

2.4. Language Learning Motivation

For students, teachers and administrators, language learning motivation is a significant, common behavior determinant. Ebrahimzadeh and Alavis (2017) indicated that study has proved that motivation influences people's behavior in the "choice of a particular action, the persistence with it and the effort expended on it." Since language learning motivation (LLM) first introduced, its theories have went through theatrical modification. Dornyei and Ushioda (2011) have classified them into three stages: the social psychological period (1959-1990), the cognitive-situated period (1990s), and the process-oriented period.

The first stage focuses on the significance of language learners' attitudes about the target language and language community. There are a lot of factors about it, like interest in foreign countries, instrumental motivation, and anxiety, to name but a few. Moreover, the second stage harmonizes motivation research with the cognitive change of psychology which paid attention to located analysis of motivation (e.g., in the classroom). On the other hand, the third stage deals motivation as a procedure which happened over time in generalities. However, these two ways are evaluated majorly on two aspects. First, while motivation appears to be the chain of the consequence of complicated interactions, it is thought to be a linear phenomenon here. Second, theories found that through explaining a group of changeable factors as substantial donors of motivation, follow a reductionist approach toward motivation during these two stages.

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

Twenty-five junior high school students that included one seventh graders, eight eighth graders, and sixteen ninth graders were involved in this research. These students who regard English as a foreign language were incited to fill out a questionnaire of language learning strategies and an interview about their reading obstacles in order to explore their pattern of language learning strategies use, the correlation between language learning strategies usage and learning motivation and their reading difficulties.

3.2. Instrument

There are three instruments in this study, including the questionnaire of language learning strategies, the questionnaire of language learning motivation and the interview of reading difficulties for junior high school students.

3.2.1. Questionnaire of Language Learning Strategies

Oxford (1990) divided language strategies into the direct language learning strategies and indirect language learning strategies. However, the direct language learning strategies also were subdivided into memory strategy, cognitive strategy and compensation strategy. On the other hand, the indirect language strategies were also subdivided into metacognitive strategy, affective strategy and social strategy. This questionnaire involved some questions about these six primary language learning strategies.

3.2.2. Questionnaire of Language Learning Motivation

In order to investigate the scale of language learning motivation, the researcher gave 19 items related to this issue to the subjects.

3.2.3. Interview about Reading Difficulties

The students were divided into three groups: low, mid, and high level. Based on these groups, there are twelve students in high reading achievement group, eight students in mid reading achievement group, and five students in low reading achievement group asked to have an interview related to their reading difficulties.

3.3. Data Collection

For this study, the junior high school students who were divided to normal class grouping instead of competence-based class grouping. These students are incited to fill out these questionnaires about language learning strategies and language learning motivation and have an interview to talk about their reading difficulties during their language learning processes.

3.4. Data Analysis

ANOVA procedures were performed to explore the junior high school students' preference of language learning strategies and whether there are the significant correlation between the language learning strategies usage and language learning motivation.

4. RESULTS

The results of three research questions which involved the students' language learning strategies' preference, the connection between language learning strategy and language learning motivation, and the students' reading difficulties were presented in this chapter by turns.

4.1. What are English Reading Difficulties among the Students of High, Mid, and Low Reading Achievement?

In order to answer the first research question that what are English reading difficulties among the students of high, mid, and low reading achievement? The students were divided into three groups: low level including five students, mid-level including eight students, and high level including twelve students. Every student was asked to have an interview to talk about their reading difficulties when learning English. Table 1 showed that the high level students would have trouble that they can't memorize vocabulary and understand grammars, understand the meaning or goals of articles, and tell there are one more meaning of the same vocabulary.

Table-1. Reading difficulties among reading high proficiency.

Rank	Item	N	%
1	Can't understand vocabulary, grammars	7	42%
2	Can't understand the meanings or goals of articles	4	33%
3	Can't tell there are one more meaning of same vocabulary.	3	25%
Total		12	100%

Table 2 showed that the mid-level students would have difficulty that they can't memorize vocabulary and understand grammars, understand the meaning of the sentences, and know the meaning or goals of articles.

Table-2. Reading difficulties among reading mid proficiency.

Rank	Item	N	%
1	Can't understand vocabulary, grammars	4	50%
2	Can't understand the meanings of sentences	3	37%
3	Can't know the meanings or goals of articles	1	13%
Total		8	100%

According to Table 1 and Table 2, all of students can't memorize too much vocabulary and understand the complicated grammars. They would sometimes feel confused about the meaning or goals of articles. Table 3 showed the low level students would have difficulty that they can't memorize vocabulary, understand grammars, understand the meaning or goals of articles, and understand the meaning of sentences.

Table-3. Reading difficulties among reading low proficiency.

Rank	Item	N	%
1	Can't understand vocabulary, grammars	3	60%
2	Can't understand the meanings of sentences	1	20%
3	Can't know the goals and meanings of articles	1	20%
Total		5	100%

Based on Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3, the Taiwanese students who view English as foreign language have the same obstacles. Because of their mother tongue (Chinese), there are different sentences' structures and grammars from Chinese. So, they can't memorize lots of vocabulary, and understand the complex grammars. Also, they can't even understand the meanings or theme of the sentences or articles.

4.2. Which Learning Strategies Do the Junior High School Students Use Most?

The second Research Questions is which language learning strategies do the students use the most? The Table 4 showed the most junior high school students use Cognitive Strategy (M=3.32). Based on Oxford (1990), cognitive Strategy means the students can practice writing vocabulary, sentences, grammars and so on by themselves. In addition to writing, they can even practice speaking with classmates or native speakers and watching English TV programs or movies. Therefore, they prefer to use different ways to help them learn English. This is a common and elementary strategy in order to help them learn English easily. However, Metacognitive Strategy is another strategy of most students use (M=3.18). According to Oxford (1990) they will center their learning which included overviewing and linking with already known material, paying attention and delaying speech production to focus on listening, arrange and plan their learning which involved finding out about language learning, organizing, setting goals and objectives, identifying the purpose of a language task, planning for a language task and looking for practice opportunities, and evaluate their learning which included self-monitoring and self-evaluating. Besides, metacognitive strategy is similar to cognitive strategy because the students prefer to do more practices or drills to improve their language learning abilities. Moreover, they also use Social Strategy (M=3.15). Based on Oxford (1990) the students will ask questions which included asking for clarification or verification and asking for connection, cooperate with others which involved cooperating with peers and cooperating with proficient users of the new language, and empathize with others which included developing cultural understanding and becoming aware of others' thought and feelings. If the students have misunderstanding or the vocabulary, sentences, grammars and conversation that they didn't understand, they will ask the classmates or friends for help and repeat their conversation again. Besides, they will want to know more English culture.

Table-4. Type of language learning strategy Use (N=50).

Type	N	Mean	SD	Rank
Cognitive Strategy	12	3.32	0.34	1
Compensation Strategy	7	3.14	0.51	4
Metacognitive Strategy	9	3.18	0.39	2
Memory Strategy	9	2.97	0.53	5
Affective Strategy	5	2.84	0.56	6
Social Strategy	8	3.15	0.57	3
Overall Strategies	50	3.1	0.48	

4.3. What's The Relationship between Learning Strategies and Learning Motivation?

The third Research Question is what's the relationship between learning strategies and learning motivation? The Table 5 showed the correlation that is between language learning strategy and language learning motivation is medium. The result showed that the junior high school students who use the language learning strategies may increase their language learning motivation. As Medina (2012) results, language learning strategy is quite useful for the EFL students because they improve their language learning comprehension, and when the students used these language learning strategies, their self-confidence and motivation were stimulated.

Table-5. Correlation between reading proficiency and strategy.

	Language Learning Strategies
Language Learning Motivation	0.425

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. What Are English Reading Difficulties among the Students of High-, Mid-, and Low- Reading Achievement?

According to Table 1, high reading achievement students are lack of vocabulary banks to memorize or understand the meanings of each vocabulary. However, there are some students organizing or summarizing the

articles and even they can answer the following questions correctly. On the other hand, mid reading achievement and low reading achievement students have the same reading difficulties, such as , are lack of vocabulary bank, can't understand the meanings of the sentences and articles, and even misunderstanding. Thus, they can't answer the following questions correctly. They were willing to guess instead of reading the whole articles when they had reading comprehension tests. In conclusion, most junior high school students in Taiwan had difficulties to understand the meanings of vocabulary. The junior high school students will have difficulties comprehending the sentences or even whole articles. [Diaz \(2015\)](#) indicated that the application of language learning strategy would improve students' vocabulary and they could experience different ways to find out or understand meanings of the words given. Based on the numerous studies, a lot of evidences proved that the usage of language learning strategy for students, especially for EFL/ ESL students will improve their language learning achievement and performance and stimulate their language learning motivation and their self-confidence. Take Taiwanese junior high school students for example, because of senior high school entering exam, they are forced to pass various reading comprehension tests. If they make good use of these language learning strategy, they can learn better. First of all, they can find out or understand the meanings of each vocabulary, and further, they can even comprehend the meanings or goals of these articles to answers following multiple choice questions. According the result of this study, it was proved that there was the positive correlation between language learning strategies and language learning motivation.

5.2. Which Language Learning Strategies do the Students Use Most?

According to [Oxford \(1990\)](#) language learning strategies were divided into main two parts: direct language learning strategy and indirect language learning strategy. Moreover, language learning strategies were categorized into six items, such as memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, compensation and social strategy. The result of this study showed that the students prefer to use cognitive, metacognitive and social strategy. These strategies have the similarities that the students prefer practicing with classmates, friends and even native speakers and having drills to improve their language abilities. In conclusion, the junior high school students in Taiwan prefer doing more practices and even drills to help them learn better even though they may make the mistakes. According to [Medina \(2012\)](#) with the strategy instruction, the students were able to develop meta-cognitive awareness in utilizing these language learning strategies. Furthermore, the students' learning attitude and motivation would be stimulated toward learning English.

5.3. What's the Relationship Between Learning Strategies and Learning Motivation?

The result of this study showed that the correlation that is between language learning strategy and language learning motivation is medium. It means the students who use the language learning strategies during their learning processes may increase their language learning motivation. Therefore, the students may enhance their language learning confidence after using the language learning strategies. [Setiyadi et al. \(2016\)](#) declared that the language learning strategy under the cognitive and metacognitive have played a significant role in reading comprehension and both of them are essential correlated with the reading skills. Thus, [Medina \(2012\)](#) proved that the students will improve their reading comprehension when using language learning strategies during learning English processes. Meanwhile, the application of language learning strategy will increase the students' self-confidence, and stimulate their learning achievement and learning motivation. For the future study, the research can collect more students to investigate whether there is an outstanding and significant correlation between the language learning strategy and the language learning motivation.

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