English Learning Strategies of Vietnamese Tertiary Students

by

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Declaration of originality

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Abstract

Language learning strategies (LLSs) are believed to have a major impact on language learning and performance. However, the use and effectiveness of LLSs are dependent on various learner and learning variables. This research study was carried out in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) tertiary education in Vietnam in response to the lack of research evidence regarding LLS-related issues. It was aimed at (1) identifying the types, frequency and patterns of language learning strategy use among Vietnamese EFL tertiary students; (2) investigating the relationship between the reported LLS use and learner variables such as gender, university year groups, academic majors, self-rated English proficiency, and language learning beliefs; (3) exploring students’ and teachers’ perceptions, attitudes and experiences concerning LLSs; (4) examining the current tertiary EFL education context that accommodates LLSs; and (5) developing the guiding principles in relation to LLSs for teaching-learning practices and policy.

A mixed methods approach with quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis was employed in the study. For the quantitative phase, a survey questionnaire was constructed through a four-stage process of adaptation, development, refinement and validation. In addition to demographic information and language learning beliefs, this researcher-generated English Language Learning Strategy Questionnaire (ELLSQ) measured the use of 47 learning strategies on a five-point Likert scale ("1 = Never" to "5 = Always or Almost always"). A total of 564 validly completed questionnaires were collected from EFL students at a university in Vietnam. Descriptive statistics including medians, percentages, and frequencies were used to analyse demographic data and the use of overall, group and individual LLSs. Inferential non-parametric statistics such as Mann-Whitney, Kruskall Wallis, and Spearman tests were used to identify possible correlations between the reported LLS use and learner variables. The significance level was set at p <= 0.05. For the concurrent qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were employed with ten EFL staff and ten EFL students. The focus of the interviews was on their
perceptions, attitudes and experiences regarding LLSs and the current EFL teaching and learning environment. The qualitative interview data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Descriptive analyses of the quantitative data revealed that the sampled students used a wide range of strategies at a medium frequency level (Median = 3). 17 out of 47 strategies were reported to be highly used (Median = 4), most of which were skill-based. The results of correlational analyses indicated that the use of overall, group and individual LLSs was associated with university year groups, academic majors, self-rated English proficiency, and language learning beliefs. Gender was found to correlate with the use of certain individual strategies only. The key findings from the qualitative data demonstrated an accord between EFL teachers and students regarding their strong belief in the importance of LLSs and their support for the introduction of LLS training to the current curriculum. The EFL teaching and learning environment was found to be relatively inductive to English learning, but more opportunities for practice and actual use of the target language were highly expected. All of the findings of the investigation were translated into a list of practical recommendations for students, teachers, educational administrators, and educational policy makers in relation to the promotion of LLSs among Vietnamese EFL tertiary students.
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