UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

THE LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY UiTM SHAH ALAM ESL LEARNERS

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Masters of Education (TESL)

Faculty of Education

December 2005

ABSTRACT

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By

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This study was carried out to investigate the language learning strategies adopted by undergraduate ESL learners at UiTM Shah Alam. It focuses on identifying the types of language learning strategies adopted by three groups, advanced (30 subjects), intermediate (40 subjects), and elementary (50 subjects) ESL learners. It also looks at the language learning strategies used in three different settings; in the English classroom, informally outside the classroom and preparing for English examinations.

A total number of 120 first semester bachelor's degree students from three classes from the three faculties participated in this study. The three faculties were Faculty of Business Management and Administration (46 students), Faculty of Performing Arts (34 students) and Faculty of Civil Engineering (40 students). These faculties were selected to represent the three major clusters of all the faculties in UiTM i.e. Administration and Business, Social and Humanities and Science and Technology.

The instrumentation utilized for this study was a questionnaire adapted from Oxford (1989) and Muhammad Amin Embi (2000). The questionnaire consists of two major sections, Section 1: Background Information (10 items) and Section 2: Strategy Inventory For Language Learning (49 items). Section 2 are divided into three parts, Part A: The Way you Learn English in the Classroom (17 items), Part B: The Way you Learn English Informally Outside the Classroom (23 items) and Part C: The Way you Prepare for your English Examinations (9 items).

The questionnaire was distributed in three different sessions in September 2005. All the subjects were given 45 minutes to answer the questionnaire, which were collected on the same day. The data collected was analyzed using frequency distribution. The focus of the calculation was to determine the frequencies, percentages and means of the subjects' responses to the statements in the questionnaire. All the data are presented, analyzed and interpreted based on four specific research questions.

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There are several major conclusions of the study:

1. The most frequently adopted language learning strategies by UiTM ESL learners were cognitive strategies. The second most frequently adopted strategies were metacognitive and the third was social strategies. This is then followed by compensation and memory strategies. The least frequently adopted strategies were affective strategies.

2. Most of the advanced, intermediate and elementary UiTM ESL learners adopted similar strategies as their first and second choice namely cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The least frequently used strategies by the advanced learners were memory strategies. Both the intermediate and elementary learners share the same type of least adopted language learning strategies, which were affective strategies.

3. In the classroom, UiTM ESL learners used metacognitive strategies as their first choice. This is then followed by social strategies as the second choice, and compensation strategies, the third choice. Cognitive strategies were fourth and affective strategies fifth. The last choice of strategies used in the classroom was memory strategies.

4. Informally outside the classroom, UiTM ESL learners used memory strategies as their first choice. Both, compensation and affective strategies were the second choice and cognitive strategies were the third choice. This is then followed by metacognitive strategies and finally the least preferred outside the classroom was social strategies.

5. In preparing for English examinations, UiTM ESL learners used cognitive strategies the most, memory strategies second and metacognitive strategies the third. Social strategies and affective strategies ranked fourth and fifth respectively. The least frequently used strategies in preparing for English examinations among UiTM ESL learners were compensation strategies.

The findings indicated that UiTM ESL learners use learning strategies in English language learning but there is no significant difference in the selection and utilization of strategies between advanced, intermediate or elementary learners. However, the difference is very clear in the use of learning strategies between these three groups of learners in different situational or social settings. Hence, further research should be conducted to investigate the use of language learning strategies in a specific situational or social setting involving larger population in the local context.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and the Merciful who has given me the endless strength, endurance and courage to complete this M.Ed. TESL Programme.

Working on this dissertation has been a very enlightening, rewarding and gratifying experience for me.

First and foremost, I would like to convey my utmost appreciation to the present Dean for Faculty of Education **Dr. Zainab Haji Mohd. Noor** and the former Dean, **Professor Dr. Hazadiah Mohd. Dahan**; for enabling me to get a sponsorship for my studies in UiTM under the UiTM Young Lecturer's Scheme.

My deepest gratitude and appreciation to my dear supervisor, **Associate Professor Dr. Abu Bakar Haji Ibrahim** for the precious time that he spent to give me the most invaluable ideas and guidance towards the completion of this study.

To my beloved parents, **Encik Kamaludin Ismail** and **Puan Maimunah Dollah** for their undying love and support, the phrase 'thank you' itself is never enough to express and justify my heartfelt gratitude, during the challenging moments of two years of my study. For my understanding brothers, sisters, brother-in-law, sisters-in-law, nieces and nephew; I will always treasure the help and support that you all have given me all this while. Thank you very much for being there when I need all of you the most.

Last but not least, to every single individual who has contributed directly or indirectly towards the completion of this thesis. I must say, thank you very much to every single one of you.

May Allah bless all of you always...Insyallah.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The issue of English language proficiency among ESL learners in Malaysia is not something new. It has been a seriously controversial and debatable notion in the educational field. Dean (1991) claims that, there is grave concern among politicians, academicians and parents with regard to the declining standard of English proficiency among students at all levels of education. It seems that, despite intensive and extensive exposure to the language in the schools and tertiary levels of education, students are not really proficient in English. The majority of them do not even have a basic mastery in the language.

The question to ask then is, 'What went wrong in the process of teaching and learning?' One possible answer to this question is that the students do not have appropriate learning strategies. In most of the studies on second language learning, it is reported that students' performance can be improved by following certain strategies and that the appropriate use of strategies enables learners to learn effectively and efficiently (O' Malley and Chamot, 1990; Rubin and Thompson, 1994). Muhammad Amin Embi (2000) argued that effective learners are often seen as active information processors, interpreters and synthesizers, who use a variety of different strategies to store and retrieve information. Thus, this shows that adopting appropriate and various learning strategies is one of the most important contributing factors to the success in language learning.

Brown (1994) defines 'strategies' as specific methods of approaching a problem or task, on modes of operation for achieving a particular end, and planned designs for controlling and manipulating information. He argues that

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