

**Strategic Considerations for Improving
ESL (English as a Second Language)
Learning Outcomes among College
Students in Taiwan: A Case Study**

TELAN TERESA PAN

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the
University of Canberra

September 2005

Abstract

There is considerable variation among individuals in the ability to learn a second language. Learning strategy research and learning style research, as two main areas of individual difference research, seek to help learners to 'learn how to learn', and ultimately become autonomous and independent learners. Learning strategy theory postulates that successful learning strategies can be used to good effect by less effective learners, and that teachers can promote good learning strategy usage through classroom instruction. At the same time, for there to be effective instruction to second language learners as to the most efficient learning strategy usage, there must be a research effort that looks not just at the strategies per se, but also gives attention to the cultural background of the students themselves.

However, there has been little research into the ways in which low-achieving ESL learners can develop effective learning strategies in a non-western context. The historical, political, social and economic aspects of Taiwan make this small island a fascinating place for researchers interested in exploring how English is taught and learned in a relatively monolingual society (in the sense that Chinese Mandarin is the only official language and is predominantly used all over Taiwan). Therefore, this study explores the ESL learning strategies and learning styles of 462 adult learners in Taiwan, making use of Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning and Kolb's Learning Style Inventory. Similarities and differences between the learning strategy usage of the high-achieving and low-achieving groups are also investigated. The results show that there was no statistically significant relationship between the learner's English proficiency level and their individual learning style. In sharp contrast, it was discovered that there was a highly significant relationship between the learner's English proficiency level and their choice and use of various learning strategies. It was also found that the higher the English proficiency level, the greater the variety of learning strategies adopted, and the more frequently those strategies were used.

This study aims to shed some light on the principles that underlie successful language learning, particularly in regards to the utilisation and accommodation of learning strategies and styles. The results of such a study could thus contribute to the field of second language learning in a number of ways: for the learner, the teacher, the school policy maker, and the researcher.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	ix
Acknowledgements	x

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 The Research Background	1
1.1 The Significance of the Study	4
1.2 The Research Questions	5
1.3 Limitations of the Study	7
1.4 Definition of Key Terms	9
1.5 The Research Context	13
1.5.1 <i>The Classroom in Taiwan</i>	14
1.5.2 <i>Respect for the Teacher</i>	16
1.5.3 <i>Educational Aims in Taiwan</i>	17
1.5.4 <i>Education and the Socio-Political Context in Taiwan</i>	19
1.5.5 <i>The Shift to ‘Localisation’ – Citizenship Education in Taiwan</i>	20
1.5.6 <i>Redefining the National Dimension of Citizenship Education</i>	22
1.5.7 <i>Identity Tensions in a Multileveled Community</i>	23
1.6 Structure of the Study	25

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW – LEARNING STRATEGIES

2.0 Introduction	27
2.1 Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) Strategies	28
2.1.1 <i>Models of Self-Regulated Learning</i>	28
2.1.2 <i>Learning Strategies and Academic Achievement</i>	33
2.1.3 <i>Self-Regulated Learning and Metacognition</i>	37
2.1.4 <i>The Features of Self-Regulated Learning Strategies</i>	38
2.2 Language Learning Strategies	39
2.2.1 <i>Research Background</i>	40
2.2.2 <i>Language Learning Strategies and Academic Achievement</i>	43
2.2.3 <i>Factors Affecting Strategy Choice</i>	47
2.3 Cultural Perspectives on Language Learning Strategies	50
2.3.1 <i>Overview</i>	50
2.3.2 <i>Cross-Cultural Comparisons</i>	51
2.4 Summary	56

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW – LEARNING STYLES

3.0 Introduction.....	59
3.1 Research Background	60
3.1.1 <i>Concept of Learning Style</i>	60
3.1.2 <i>Learning Style and Academic Achievement</i>	62
3.1.3 <i>Categorising Learning Style Instruments</i>	64
3.2 Experiential Learning Theory	66
3.2.1 <i>Theoretical Underpinnings</i>	66
3.2.2 <i>The Learning Process</i>	68
3.2.3 <i>Applications and Criticisms</i>	69
3.2.4 <i>Experiential Learning Cycles</i>	71
3.2.5 <i>Factors Affecting Learning Style</i>	76
3.3 Summary	77

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.0 Introduction.....	79
4.1 Methodological Framework.....	80
4.1.1 <i>Application of Case Study</i>	80
4.1.2 <i>Advantages of the Embedded Single-Case Study Design</i>	81
4.1.3 <i>Limitations of the Embedded Single-Case Study Design</i>	82
4.2 Research Design.....	83
4.3 Data Collection Methods	85
4.3.1 <i>The Case Study of Fortune Institute of Technology</i>	85
4.3.2 <i>Questionnaire Survey</i>	89
4.3.3 <i>Observations</i>	92
4.3.4 <i>Interviews</i>	93
4.4 Categorisation System of English Proficiency	98
4.5 Instrumentation	100
4.5.1 <i>Overview of Major Inventories</i>	102
4.6 Research Procedures	104
4.7 Data Analysis Methods.....	105
4.8 Summary	106

CHAPTER FIVE

ESL LEARNING STRATEGIES OF TAIWANESE COLLEGE STUDENTS

5.0 Introduction.....	109
5.1 Relationships between Grade Point Average and Other Variables	110
5.1.1 <i>GPA and Gender</i>	111
5.1.2 <i>GPA and Age</i>	113
5.1.3 <i>GPA and Students' Self-Rating of English Proficiency</i>	115
5.1.4 <i>GPA and English-Speaking Countries Visited</i>	117
5.1.5 <i>GPA and Major English Language Tests Taken</i>	118
5.1.6 <i>GPA and Learning Strategies</i>	120
5.2 Classification of Second Language Learning Strategies	121

5.2.1 Direct Strategies	122
5.2.2 Indirect Strategies	124
5.3 Strategy Usage of Taiwanese Students	126
5.3.1 Brief Comparison of Students' Use of Six Strategy Groups	126
5.3.2 Memory Strategies	127
5.3.3 Cognitive Strategies	130
5.3.4 Compensation Strategies for Speaking & Writing.....	134
5.3.5 Metacognitive Strategies.....	137
5.3.6 Affective Strategies.....	139
5.3.7 Social Strategies.....	142
5.3.8 Gender & Age vs. Strategy Usage	145
5.4 Summary	146

CHAPTER SIX

LEARNING STYLES OF TAIWANESE COLLEGE STUDENTS

6.0 Introduction.....	150
6.1 Correlation Analysis – Kolb and Willing	151
6.2 Kolb's Four-Stage Learning Cycle	152
6.3 Learning Styles and English Language Proficiency	154
6.4 Learning Styles of Taiwanese College Students.....	158
6.4.1 Distribution of Learning Styles	158
6.4.2 Mean Response Analysis (By Question)	160
6.4.3 Supplementary Information – Results from Willing's Learning Style Questionnaire for ESL	173
6.5 Relationship between Learning Styles and ESL Learning Strategies.....	175
6.6 Summary	177

CHAPTER SEVEN

HIGH-ACHIEVING & LOW-ACHIEVING ESL LEARNERS: A COMPARISON

7.0 Introduction.....	179
7.1 Micro Strategies that Best Predict High Performance	180
7.1.1 Strategy: I try to talk like native English speakers	182
7.1.2 Strategy: If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.....	183
7.1.3 Strategy: I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.....	183
7.1.4 Strategy: I practice the sounds of English	184
7.1.5 Strategy: I use flashcards to remember new English words [negative]	185
7.1.6 Strategy: I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English	186
7.1.7 Summary of Predictor Strategies	187
7.2 The Interviewees.....	188
7.2.1 High-Achievers	189
7.2.2 Low-Achievers.....	195
7.3 Similarities and Differences between High-Achieving and Low-Achieving ESL Learners	201

7.3.1 Similarities	201
7.3.2 Differences	204
7.4 Characteristics of High-Achieving ESL Learners	209
7.4.1 Some 'Urban Myths' Concerning High-Achievers in ESL	209
7.4.2 Characteristics of High-Achievers	213
7.5 Summary	216

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

8.0 Introduction	220
8.1 Review of the Research Process	220
8.2 Answering the Research Questions	224
8.2.1 Research Question One	224
8.2.2 Research Question Two	228
8.2.3 Research Question Three	229
8.3 Recommendations for Learners	232
8.3.1 Utilise the Five Positive Predictor Strategies	232
8.3.2 Narrowing the Gap between Learning Preferences and Learning Perceptions	233
8.3.3 Having More Cognitive and Metacognitive Engagement in Learning	234
8.3.4 Making the Most of the Strategies Which Are Already Being Used	235
8.3.5 Making the Most of the Shared Similarities between High- and Low- Achievers	236
8.3.6 Understanding How Personal Learning Style Impacts Strategy Use	237
8.3.7 Cultivating the Characteristics of High-Achievers	237
8.4 Purposeful Strategy Training	238
8.4.1 Need for Training for the Utilisation of Learning Strategies	238
8.4.2 Collaboration with Students, Teachers, and Departments	240
8.5 Implementing Learning Strategy Training	242
8.5.1 Two Types of Courses	242
8.5.2 Training Suggestions for Teachers/Educators	243
8.6 Implications and Recommendations for Further Research	246
8.6.1 Integration of Theory and Practice	246
8.6.2 Impact of Learning Style on English Language Proficiency	247
8.6.3 Concluding Remarks	248

APPENDICES

A	250
B	253
C	254
D	257

REFERENCES	263
-------------------------	-----

List of Tables

<i>Table 4.2 Research Design</i>	84
<i>Table 4.3.1 Characteristics of Taiwanese Colleges/Universities of Technology and Science</i>	87
<i>Table 4.3.2 Breakdown of English Majors at Fortune Institute of Technology</i>	91
<i>Table 4.3.4a Structure of the In-Depth Interview</i>	94
<i>Table 4.4 English-related Subjects at Fortune Institute of Technology</i>	98
<i>Table 5.1 Grade Point Average of Respondents</i>	111
<i>Table 5.1.1a English Proficiency and Gender Crosstabulation</i>	112
<i>Table 5.1.1b Chi-Square Tests on Relationship between GPA and Gender</i>	113
<i>Table 5.1.2a Age Distributions of Respondents</i>	114
<i>Table 5.1.2b English Proficiency and Age Crosstabulation</i>	114
<i>Table 5.1.2c Chi-Square Tests on Relationship between GPA and Age</i>	114
<i>Table 5.1.3a Respondents' Self-Ratings on English Proficiency</i>	115
<i>Table 5.1.3b Students' Self-Ratings and English Proficiency Crosstabulation</i>	116
<i>Table 5.1.3c Chi-Square Tests on Relationship between Students' English Proficiency and Self-Ratings</i>	117
<i>Table 5.1.4 English Speaking Countries Visited by Students</i>	117
<i>Table 5.1.5 Major Standardised English Language Tests Taken by Students</i>	119
<i>Table 5.1.6 Relationships between GPA and Learning Strategies</i>	120
<i>Table 5.3.1 Range, Mean and Standard Deviation of Strategies</i>	126
<i>Table 5.3.2 Frequency Distributions of Memory Strategies</i>	127
<i>Table 5.3.3 Frequency Distributions of Cognitive Strategies</i>	130
<i>Table 5.3.4 Frequency Distributions of Compensation Strategies</i>	135
<i>Table 5.3.5 Frequency Distributions of Metacognitive Strategies</i>	137
<i>Table 5.3.6 Frequency Distributions of Affective Strategies</i>	140
<i>Table 5.3.7 Frequency Distributions of Social Strategies</i>	143
<i>Table 5.3.8 Relationship between Strategy Usage, Gender and Age</i>	146
<i>Table 6.1 Correlations between Kolb's and Willing's Learning Style Questionnaires</i>	151
<i>Table 6.3a Learning Style (Kolb) and English Proficiency Crosstabulation</i>	155
<i>Table 6.3b Chi-Square Tests on Relationship between Learning Style (Kolb) and GPA</i>	155
<i>Table 6.3c Learning Style (Willing) and English Proficiency Crosstabulation</i>	155
<i>Table 6.3d Chi-Square Tests on Relationship between Learning Style (Willing) and GPA</i>	156
<i>Table 6.4.1a Distribution of Learning Styles (Kolb)</i>	158
<i>Table 6.4.1b Distribution of Learning Styles (Willing)</i>	159
<i>Table 6.4.2a LSI Question One</i>	160
<i>Table 6.4.2b LSI Question Two</i>	162
<i>Table 6.4.2c LSI Question Three</i>	163

<i>Table 6.4.2d LSI Question Four</i>	164
<i>Table 6.4.2e LSI Question Five</i>	165
<i>Table 6.4.2f LSI Question Six</i>	166
<i>Table 6.4.2g LSI Question Seven</i>	167
<i>Table 6.4.2h LSI Question Eight</i>	168
<i>Table 6.4.2i LSI Question Nine</i>	169
<i>Table 6.4.2j LSI Question Ten</i>	170
<i>Table 6.4.2k LSI Question Eleven</i>	171
<i>Table 6.4.2l LSI Question Twelve</i>	172
<i>Table 6.4.3 Frequency Distributions of Willing's Learning Style Questionnaire for ESL</i>	173
<i>Table 6.5a Relationship between Learning Style and Learning Strategy</i>	175
<i>Table 7.1 Micro Strategies Which Best Predict Higher Language Proficiency</i>	181
<i>Table 7.2 List of Interviewees</i>	188
<i>Table 7.3.2a Comparison among Strategy Groups of Different Proficiency Levels</i>	204

List of Figures

<i>Figure 3.2.4a Two-Stage Learning Cycles</i>	73
<i>Figure 3.2.4b Three-Stage Learning Cycles</i>	73
<i>Figure 3.2.4c A Four-Stage Learning Cycle (Juch, 1983)</i>	74
<i>Figure 3.2.4d A Four-Stage Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984)</i>	74
<i>Figure 3.2.4e A Five-Stage Learning Cycle (Kelly, 1955)</i>	75
<i>Figure 3.2.4f A Five-Stage Learning Cycle (Pfeiffer & Jones, 1983)</i>	75
<i>Figure 4.3.4b Areas of Strong Learning Style</i>	97
<i>Figure 5.2 Interrelationships between Direct and Indirect Strategies and Among the Six Strategy Groups (Source: Oxford, 1990)</i>	121
<i>Figure 6.2 Kolb's Four-Stage Learning Cycle</i>	152
<i>Figure 6.5b Relationship between Learning Style and Learning Strategy (Plot)</i>	176
<i>Figure 7.3.2b Comparison of Means of Six Strategy Groups</i>	205

Acknowledgements

Among those who have helped me greatly in this research work, and there are many, I'd firstly like to thank my primary supervisor, Associate Professor Carole Kayrooz. Carole was not only a mentor to my doctoral study, but also a good friend, who was always there for me through the ups and downs of my research. Her constant support and pertinent advice have been greatly appreciated.

Secondly, my sincere thanks go to Dr. Jeremy Jones and Dr. Deborah Hill, who have given me valuable feedback throughout this study, all the way from the writing of the initial proposal to the final submission of my thesis. Their knowledge and expertise in TESOL have offered great insight for my research work.

Thirdly, I would also like to thank UC's statistical consultant David Pederson. His proficiency in statistics, and his ability to explain statistical concepts plainly and clearly, provided me with a solid foundation for the statistical component of this thesis.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my husband Marc, whose love and support, particularly his prayer support, upheld me through the difficult times that one encounters in a research effort such as this. Having himself gone through the experience of writing a PhD thesis, he also provided much help with proofreading and other practical editing duties. My love for him continued to grow tremendously as he shared in my successes and failures.

Above all, however, the completion of this thesis was only made possible by the grace of my wonderful God, who always sent people to help me through the task; and, in the process, gave me the skills and the perseverance to 'finish the race'.