AN INVESTIGATION OF TAIWANESE GRADE 5-6 STUDENTS’ EFL LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This study investigated the EFL language learning strategies used by grade 5 and grade 6 students and their language learning experience in Taipei, Taiwan. A total of 932 grade 5 and grade 6 students in elementary schools in Taipei participated in this study. Two sets of questionnaires were used, the background information questionnaire and the Language Learning Strategy Inventory (LLSI). The researcher found that students reported using six dimensions of EFL language learning strategies, all in medium use level: cognitive strategies, social strategies, association strategies, compensation strategies, assistance strategies, and constructive learning strategies. It was also found that gender differences exist in the use of language learning strategies, except in compensation strategies and constructive strategies. Females reported use language learning strategies more frequently than males did. EFL Language learning experience was found mostly significantly related to the use of language learning strategies, according to the following variables: years of studying English, years of studying English outside of school, years of living in English-speaking countries, experience of studying English in English-speaking countries, experience of traveling abroad, level of parental support and general level of enjoyment in learning English. Based on the result, the researcher suggests language instructors understand students’ learning experience and their background before the instruction, have certain level of knowledge of language learning strategies, and provide individual student with the language learning strategies that can work best on him, so that effective language learning results and rewarding language learning experience can be achieved.

Key Words: language learning strategy, EFL, foreign language education, elementary school.
INTRODUCTION

Research background

In today’s world, the importance of English is highlighted by the role it plays, as a shared international language for communication, particularly in economic growth; steps toward globalization; and the frequent interaction of culture, business and traveling. Thus, for people in the global village today, the importance of English proficiency cannot be overstated.

Many countries in Asia are taking action to make sure that children have the required level of English proficiency. In these few years, the Taiwanese people also catch up with the trend and urgently seek English proficiency. Parents send their children to private language institutes at a very young age, hoping to give them the chance to build a solid foundation, an early start and a high level of interest in language learning. Public expectation then resulted in the government adding English to the elementary school curriculum. The Ministry of Education in Taiwan claims in the project, “a new nine-year curriculum of junior high and elementary school education,” that the purpose of English education is to cultivate students’ basic English communication proficiency; to form students’ habits, interest, and strategies in learning English, and to promote students’ understanding of native and foreign culture (Ministry of Education, 2000).

Research showed that second language proficiency/achievement is related to language learning strategies (Bremner, 1999; Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Oxford, 1989; Phillips, 1991). It appears that successful language learners have the ability to orchestrate and combine particular types of language learning strategies in effective ways, according to their own learning needs (Cohen, 1990; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1993). All language learners use certain types of language learning strategies to a certain level, but there are differences in the frequency and choice of use among different learners (Chamot & Kupper, 1989). “Effective instruction in foreign or second languages requires an understanding of individual differences among learners” (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995, p. 360). In other words, to learn English
well, language learning strategies are one key dimension. However, most teachers show little understanding of students’ language learning strategies and little knowledge about language learning strategies (Chang, 1991; Oxford & Crookall, 1989; Phillips 1990, 1991). Research also showed that many factors could influence the choice and use of language learning strategies, such as language learning experience, motivation, sex, age, self-perception of proficiency, duration of learning the language, attitude, language learning goals, personality, national origin, teaching methods and strategy training (Chamot, 1993; Park, 1997). Thus, to help students learn English well, language learning strategy and the background factors can be the key aspects that language instructors consider.

Over the past few decades, a considerable number of studies have been done on language learning strategies, several of which are the focus of English education in Taiwan. However, the topic of the EFL language learning strategies and language learning experience of Taiwanese elementary school students has never been examined. Thus, in this study, the researcher intends to explore the EFL language learning strategies of Taiwanese elementary school students and their language learning experience. By understanding this topic, the researcher hopes to provide information for Taiwanese elementary students, researchers, teachers and parents, in order to achieve effective language learning results and rewarding language learning experiences.

**Purpose of the Study**

As Horwitz states, “The ultimate purpose of studying learner strategies is, of course, an applied one; researchers and teachers hope to determine which strategies are most effective and help students adopt more productive learning procedures” (1987, p. 26). The purpose of this research study is to investigate the EFL language learning strategies used by grade 5-6 students and their language learning experience in Taipei, Taiwan. In short, this study has the following major goals:

1. To identify the EFL language learning strategies used by grade 5-6 students.
2. To identify the relationships between female and male students in the use of EFL language learning strategies.

3. To identify the relationships between EFL language learning strategies and language learning experience, according to the following independent variables:
   (a) years of studying English;
   (b) years of studying English outside schools;
   (c) years of living in English-speaking countries;
   (d) experience of studying English in English-speaking countries;
   (e) experience of travel abroad;
   (f) level of parental support; and
   (g) general level of enjoyment in learning English.

Significance of the Study

Since the grade 5–6 students in Taipei are now the pioneers in EFL education, it is necessary to pay serious attention to their learning and to try to improve the EFL program. Only limited research has been carried out to explore what EFL learning strategies the grade 5–6 students used and what their language learning experience was while learning English as a foreign language in Taipei. This study, it was hoped, would lead to a better understanding of this topic and the subjects mentioned above, and help improve English instruction and curriculum design for elementary school students.

Research Questions

This study was designed to examine the following questions:

1. What are the EFL language learning strategies that elementary grade 5–6 students use?

2. Is there a difference between male and female grade 5–6 students in the use of EFL language learning strategies?

3. What are the relationships between the use of EFL language learning strategies and language learning experience, according to the following
independent variables:
(a) years of studying English;
(b) years of studying English outside schools;
(c) years of living in English-speaking countries;
(d) experience of studying English in English-speaking countries;
(e) experience of travel abroad;
(f) level of parental support; and
(g) general level of enjoyment in learning English?

**Assumptions of the Study**

This study has the following general assumptions:

1. Language learners use different language learning strategies to facilitate their second language learning. Some language learning strategies are effective, but some are less effective for specific learning tasks or for learners at particular levels.
2. The subjects answered the questionnaire to the best of their ability.
3. The subjects were assumed to have at least one year of EFL education in school.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study has the following limitations:

1. The number of subjects was limited to students who voluntarily participated in answering and completing the instrument of the study. Thus, the results of this study cannot be generalized to a larger population.
2. Not all learners’ language learning strategies were included in the questionnaire of the study. The language learning strategies in this study were limited to those appearing in the questionnaire of the study.
3. The questionnaire does not describe in detail the language learning strategies a student uses in specific language tasks. All the disadvantages of this survey technique were recognized.
4. The language learning experience in this study were specified and limited.
Not all personal language learning experience factors were included in this study.

5. The subjects of this study were limited to grade 5–6 elementary students in Taipei City, Taiwan.

6. The researcher was very careful to assure the sample represent the population.

**Definition of Terms**

The following are definitions of terms used in this research study.

**Language learning strategies**: In this study, language learning strategies means the specific actions, behaviors, steps or techniques that students use to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing and using the second language (Oxford, 1990). Oxford divides language learning strategies into six categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

**SILL**: SILL is the abbreviation for the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning.

**LLSI**: LLSI is the abbreviation for the Language Learning Strategy Inventory, the main instrument in the study, revised and modified for the study from SILL.

**Second language**: “A second language has social and communicative functions within the community where it is learned” (Oxford, 1990). Examples are French in Canada, English in Hong Kong, and English in South Africa.

**ESL**: ESL is the abbreviation for English as a Second Language.

**Foreign language**: “A foreign language does not have immediate social and communicative functions within the community where it is learned; it is employed mostly to communicate elsewhere” (Oxford, 1990). Examples are English in Taiwan, English in France and Japanese in the US.

**EFL**: EFL is the abbreviation for English as a Foreign Language.

**LLS**: LLS is the abbreviation for language learning strategies.

**Validity**: Validity is “the degree to which a test measures what it is intended to measure” (Gay, 1987, p. 553).
Reliability: Reliability is “the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it measures” (Gay, 1987, p. 549).

Grade 5–6 elementary school students: In this study, grade 5–6 elementary school students means all grade 5 and grade 6 elementary school students in Taipei City, Taiwan, in public and private elementary schools.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Definition of Language Learning Strategies

Bialystok (1978, p. 71) defined language learning strategies as “optional means for exploiting available information to improve competence in a second language”. Rubin (1975) gave a definition of strategy as “the techniques or devices, which a learner may use to acquire knowledge” (p. 43). In a later study, Rubin (1987) also indicated, “Language learning strategies are strategies which contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affects learning directly” (p. 23).

Language learning strategies were defined more specifically in Chamot (1987), as “techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information” (p. 71). O’Malley and Chamot (1990) offered another definition of language learning strategies as “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information” (p. 1).

Oxford (1990) provided an even more specific definition of learning strategies. She states “learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations” (p. 8). Based on this definition, language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviors, steps or techniques that learners use in order to help the result of their learning in inputting, comprehending and outputting the target language. She believed that appropriate language learning strategies could help learners gain self-confidence and improved proficiency.
MacIntyre (1994) emphasized the learners’ deliberate action of language learning strategies. He defined language learning strategies as “the actions chosen by language students that are intended to facilitate language acquisition and communication” (p. 190). This definition highlights the awareness and intention of learners’ use of language learning strategies. This is an important difference with the previous definitions.

Cohen (1998) defined language learning and language use strategies as “those processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or use of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about that language” (p. 4).

**Strategies used by Successful Language Learners**

Research has shown that effective language learners generally use proper learning strategies, and the use of learning strategies does help their learning results (Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; Rubin, 1981). In order to understand language learning strategies and how they can be used to help students’ language learning, researchers have tried to identify the language learning strategies used by good/effective language learners and distinguish the differences of strategy use between good/effective learners and less effective ones.

Rubin (1975) listed the language learning strategies used by good language learners:

1. They are willing and accurate guessers.
2. They have a strong drive to communicate.
3. They are often uninhibited.
4. They focus on the pattern and form of language.
5. They practice as much as they can.
6. They monitor their own speech and that of others.
7. They pay attention to meaning.

In Rubin’s later study (1981), she provided 14 practical and detailed strategies for being a successful language learner. Learners:
1. can decide the most suitable learning modes for themselves;
2. are organized;
3. are creative;
4. use all opportunities to practice;
5. use memorization;
6. learn to live in uncertainty;
7. learn from mistakes;
8. use language knowledge;
9. use the situation and environment to improve understanding;
10. guess intelligently;
11. memorize the words/sentences as a whole;
12. learn the form of sentences;
13. use the skill of expression;
14. use all kinds of literary form.

In his later study, Stern (1983) expanded and subsumed the 10 strategies under the four rubrics: active planning, academic learning, social learning and affective learning.

Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, and Todesco’s study (1978) focused on the characteristics, cognitive style and strategy use of successful language learners. They used Stern’s list of strategies (1975) as an initial frame of reference and modified it according to the interview results they obtained in their study. Naiman et al. (1978) then suggested a language learning strategy framework with five major strategy approaches and several minor approaches. The five major strategies, which describe the overall approach to language learning, are essential for successful language acquisition. These strategies are as follows:

1. Active task approach: good language learners involve themselves actively in the language learning task. The minor strategies are, for example, responding positively to the given learning opportunities, adding related language learning activities into the regular program, engaging in practice
activities and changing the usual purpose of an activity in order to focus on second language learning.

2. Realization of language as a system: good language learners develop awareness that language is a system. The minor strategies are, comparing the native language with second language, analyzing the target language, and developing learning techniques using that language as a system.

3. Understanding that language is a means of communication and interaction: the minor strategies are emphasizing fluency over accuracy at the early stages of language learning, looking for opportunities to communicate with target-language users, and displaying critical sensitivity to language use, for example, the specific sociocultural meaning of language.


5. Monitoring the second language performance: good language learners monitor their own learning steps and results, and revise their second language system constantly by testing, guessing, asking native speakers, etc.

Abraham and Vann (Abraham & Vann, 1987; Vann & Abraham, 1990) undertook two separate studies to understand the language learning strategies used by successful and unsuccessful learners. Their findings demonstrate that the strategies unsuccessful learners used are generally considered useful, and are often the same ones successful learners used. The difference between successful and unsuccessful learners is how flexible they are in choosing their language learning strategies and how appropriately they use the strategies in the situation or task.

Chamot and Kupper (1989) conducted a three-year study of the use of learning strategies by foreign language students and their teachers. They found that students of all ability levels used language learning strategies. What differentiated effective learners from less effective learners are the range and the way in which strategies were used. Effective language learners "used strategies more often, more appropriately, with greater variety, and in ways that helped them complete the task
Categories of Language Learning Strategies

Oxford (1990), based on earlier research conducted over the years, outlined a classification system. She classifies strategies into two major groups: direct and indirect. In her definition, direct strategies “directly involve the target language” and “require mental processing of the language” (p. 37). Indirect strategies “support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language” (p. 135). The two major strategies are mutually supporting and can be subdivided into six broad categories. Direct strategies include three groups of strategies: memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies include three groups of strategies: metacognitive, affective and social. According to Oxford (1990), although indirect strategies do not directly involve learning the target language, they support and regulate the learner’s language learning based on his or her learning style, affective traits and behavioral patterns. Based on this classification, Oxford developed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) to evaluate the use of language learning strategy.

This researcher chose Oxford’s (1990) classification for this research study, because Oxford’s classification seems to be more comprehensive and detailed, covering learners’ thoughts and behaviors. Oxford’s Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was further applied and modified for this study.

Factors Affecting Language Learning Strategies

Several studies have examined the relationship between language learning strategies used and the factors that affect the choice (e.g., Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985). Many factors affect the use and choice of language learning strategies, such as age, gender, years of study, proficiency, motivation, studying abroad, personality, task, teaching methods. Literature review of factors related to this study was reported as follows.

Gender

According to the research, a significant relationship exists between gender and
language learning strategy choice. In studies done by Oxford and her colleagues (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989), female students reported significantly greater use of learning strategies in many categories of language learning strategies over male students. Ehrman and Oxford (1989) further found that females reported significantly more use of language learning strategies than males did in four categories: general study strategies, functional practice (authentic language use) strategies, strategies for searching for and communicating meaning, and self-management strategies.


Tannen (1990, 1993) associated gender differences in language learning strategies use with females' social and affective behaviors, such as females are less competitive, more cooperative and emphasize closeness. Watanabe (1990) showed that female learners have different patterns of strategy use from those of male learners.

Sy (1994, 1995) investigated the relationship of Taiwanese university students' gender and the use of language learning strategies. Sy found that female students used all six categories of language learning strategies more frequently than male students did. The six categories are memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affection and social strategies. A study by Hashim and Sahil (1994) found that Malaysian females preferred affective strategies more than males did.

Oxford and Ehrman's (1995) study involving 520 highly educated and highly motivated adult learners in the US, showed significant strategy-related gender differences and that female learners more often than male learners used language learning strategies. Green and Oxford (1995) notes the increasing evidence of the relationship between gender and language learning strategy use. They indicated that females used more strategies more frequently than males.
Sheorey (1999) studied language learning strategies of 1261 Indian college students studying English, and significant differences in the frequency of language learning strategy use between males and females were reported.

Most of the research results favor females over males in language learning strategies use. However, Tran (1988) investigated the language learning strategies of Vietnamese immigrants in the United States. This research indicated that men used more strategies than women because men worked outside the home. Wharton (2000) indicated a similar finding; he stated that “at the specific-item level,” males used significantly more strategies than females did. He believed this result might be reflected in the study sample. In his sample group of university students, 72% were engineering or computer science majors, 23% were accounting or business majors, and 5% were in communication studies. The absence of humanities majors might result in the differences between his findings and those of other researchers. Wharton also pointed out that gender differences might result from a combination of socialization and physiology.

Osanai (2000) investigated the use of language learning strategies of 147 foreign students in the United States. He reported no significant differences between genders in the use of language learning strategies as a whole, but noted that female learners had a tendency to use more language learning strategies than male learners did.

**Years of Studying the Target Language**

Oxford and Nyikos (1989) have studied the relationship between the background factors of university students and their choices of language learning strategies. A significant relationship was found between years of study and choice of language learning strategies. Students who had studied the target foreign language for more than four years tended to use more communication-oriented strategies than less experienced students.

Prokop (1989) found that students who had studied German for three or more years used a “global approach” to the learning task more frequently than students...
with less experience or exposure to German. He indicated that students with more years of language study had better strategies in mind for choosing and used the global approach more effectively than did less experienced students.

Osanai (2000) studied foreign students in the US. No significant correlation was found between the use of language learning strategies and years of studying English.

**Length of Studying Abroad**

In his study of the relationship between Japanese college/university students' external factors and their choices of language learning strategies, Watanabe (1990) concluded that living abroad had certain effects on the learners' use of the communication learning strategies.

Osanai (2000) examined 147 Asian and Latino students in universities, and reported no statistically significant correlation between the use of language learning strategies and length of stay in the United States. He reported a statistically significant correlation between students' school major and their strategy use. He stressed that, students who major in science/computer/health science reported more frequent use of language learning strategies than did those who major in business/law.

Based on the literature review and the students' situation in Taipei, in this study of language learning strategies and language learning experience, the researcher specified language learning experience as the following seven aspects:

1. years of studying English,
2. years of studying English outside schools,
3. years of living in English-speaking countries,
4. experience of studying English in English-speaking countries,
5. experience of travel abroad,
6. level of parental support,
7. general level of enjoyment in learning English.
METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Grade 5 and grade 6 students in Taipei, Taiwan were the target population. Cluster sampling and random sampling were used in this study. The researcher divided Taipei City into four districts: eastern, western, southern and northern. In each district, two elementary schools were randomly selected. In each elementary school, two classes of grade 5 and two classes of grade 6 students were randomly chosen as the samples. A total of thirty-two classes of grade 5 and 20 classes of grade 6 students participated in this study. The numbers of students in each class were slightly different.

Two sets of questionnaires, the LLSI and Background questionnaires, were combined and presented as one, the main instrument of this study. The questionnaire was distributed to assess students’ language learning strategies and background information. The school calendar in Taiwan is from September to June in the next year; there are two semesters in each school year, September to January, and February to June. Students responded to this questionnaire in May 2002, at the end of the school year 2001.

Instrument

Two sets of questionnaires were used in this study: (Appendix)

1. Background information questionnaire, and
2. Language Learning Strategy Inventory (LLSI).

Background Information Questionnaire

The background information questionnaire used in this study was developed by the researcher. It requests demographic information and information of language learning experience of the subjects. Eight questions were included in the background information questionnaire. Items 1 asked for the demographic information of the subjects, their gender. In items 2-8, the language learning experience of the subjects was identified. This includes information on the length of time learning English, length of time learning English in a private institution, length of stay in
English-speaking countries, length of learning English in English-speaking countries, times of travel abroad, level of parental support in learning English, and level of enjoyment of learning English.

**Language Learning Strategy Inventory**

The Language Learning Strategy Inventory was developed based on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1990). The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1990, pp. 293–300) was first designed to assess the frequency of language learning strategies used by students at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. It is a self-reporting survey questionnaire, later developed into two versions. One contains 80 items, designed for language learners whose first language is English. The other contains 50 items designed for learners of English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL). In this study, the ESL/EFL 50-item version of SILL was used as the base questionnaire to be modified. SILL has been conducted 40 to 50 times, with approximately 9000 language learners involved since it was developed (Green & Oxford, 1995). Considerable evidences show that SILL is valid and reliable (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). The social desirability of SILL is also tested and no fakability is shown.

Although SILL has been employed 40 to 50 times with approximately 9000 language learners, applying it in this study was still a consideration. First, most of the studies using SILL involved adult subjects. In this study, the subjects were grade 5-6 students. Second, most of the studies were done in the U.S., or English-speaking countries, for those not in the English environment, the researchers did modification needed of the SILL in order to get understanding and research results. Therefore, in this study, based on the above two points, it was necessary to modify the original SILL according to the situation and the characteristics of subjects, in order to better measure the English language learning strategy use of grade 5 and grade 6 elementary school students in Taipei, Taiwan.

The researcher consulted several experienced EFL teachers, experts in this field, and students in Taiwan, who were familiar with the SILL. Using their opinions
and assessments, the researcher deleted 18 items that seemed improper or beyond the comprehension ability of the children in Taiwan. Thirty-two items were derived from the SILL and used as a draft questionnaire, LLSI. The LLSI utilized as five-point Likert scale, as it was in SILL, asking language learners to report the frequency with which they use certain language learning strategies in each item.

For the pilot test, two elementary schools in Taipei, Taiwan, were randomly selected; in each school, one grade 5 class and one grade 6 class were also randomly selected as the subjects. A total of 121 pilot test questionnaires were distributed and obtained. According to the results of the pilot tests, the reliability and validity of the Language Learning Strategy Inventory were established.

The results of item analysis established the reliability of the LLSI. If the item’s CR (critical ratio) is lower than 3 and p (significant level) is higher than .05, the item would be deleted. In the LLSI, all items had a CR higher than 3 and p lower than .05. Thus, all items were reserved at this stage.

After the item analysis, a factor analysis was conducted on the pilot test data, in order to determine the validity of the instrument. Factor analysis examined the interrelationships among the items, and identified groups of items that shared sufficient variation. Items with a factor loadings lower than .3, would be deleted. Based on the result of factor analysis, item 31 and item 32, with a factor loading lower than .3, were deleted. Six factors were identified with Eigenvalues higher than 1. According to the sequence of the percentage of variance, the six factors are identified in the following:

1. Factor one, cognitive strategies—contains 12 items
   - 13. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.
   - 12. I read for pleasure in English.
   - 10. I start conversations in English.
   - 11. I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.
   - 9. I try to talk like native English speakers.
1. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.

18. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.

7. I review English lessons often.

8. I say or write new English words several times.

16. I try to find patterns in English.

14. I first skim an English passage (read or over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.

17. I try not to translate word-for-word.

2. Factor two, social strategies—contains 4 items

28. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.

30. I ask for help for English speakers.

29. I practice English with other students.

27. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.

3. Factor three, association strategies—contains 5 items

4. I use rhymes to remember new English words.

3. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.

15. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.

2. I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.

24. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.

4. Factor four, compensation strategies—contains 4 items

21. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.
• 20. When I can’t think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.
• 22. I read English without looking up every new word.
• 23. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.

5. Factor five, assistance strategies—contains 3 items
• 5. I use flashcards to remember new English words.
• 6. I physically act out new English words.
• 26. I write down my feelings in language learning diary.

6. Factor six, constructive learning strategies—contains 2 items
• 19. I make guesses to understand unfamiliar English words.
• 25. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.

The reliability of the LLSI, as assessed by Cronbach alpha for internal consistency, was .9079. For the six factors, Cronbach alpha was between .5372 ~ .8798.

A Chinese version of the LLSI and the background information questionnaire were used for this study in order to minimize any possible errors because of the students' comprehension of English. The Chinese version of the research instrument was validated independently by two linguistic experts who teach Chinese-English translation.

Participants

The researcher divided Taipei City into four districts: east, west, south and north. In each district, two elementary schools were randomly selected. Two classes of grade 5 and two classes of grade 6 students in each elementary school were also randomly selected. A total of nine hundred and forty students participated in this study. All unusable questionnaires, those either incomplete or did not follow the answering instructions, were identified and discarded. As a result, nine hundred and thirty-two respondents (99% of nine hundred and forty cases) were used as the basis for data analysis.
Data Collection

The researcher started collecting data by requesting the permission of the school authority and the EFL teachers involved. The researcher went to each school, explained the purpose and instruction of the study questionnaire. The EFL teachers helped distributed the questionnaire and consent forms. The teachers were given two weeks to administer the consent forms and the questionnaires and had the freedom to decide when to distribute it, either in the class time or in the group activity time. The researcher went to pick up the data and promised to share the results of the study with the teachers as soon as the study was completed.

Data Analysis

The data collected was coded, and entered into a computer data file by optical scoring and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, standard deviations and percentages, were reported in order to understand the learners' language learning strategies use. The average scores of 3.5-5.0 on the 5-point Likert scale were defined as high use; average scores of 2.5-3.4 were defined as medium use; and average scores defined as low use were 1.0-2.4.

T-test and one-way ANOVA were used to determine the effects of gender and language learning experience on learners' language learning strategy use. The Scheffe post-hoc test was used to determine any significant differences. The standard for significance in this study was $p < .05$.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Research Question One

What are the language learning strategies that elementary grades 5–6 students use?

Descriptive statistics were employed to understand the language learning strategies that elementary grades 5–6 students use. The mean score
of the 932 participants in this study was 2.93, medium use of language learning strategies. Based on factor analysis, language learning strategies that elementary grades 5–6 students use were defined in six dimensions: cognitive strategies, social strategies, association strategies, compensation strategies, assistance strategies and constructive learning strategies.

Summary of the Six Dimensions of Language Learning Strategies

<table>
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<th>SD</th>
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<tr>
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Research Question Two

Is there a difference between male and female grades 5–6 students in the use of language learning strategies?

A T-test was performed to determine if differences existed between genders in the use of language learning strategies. As shown in Table 46, the statistical results revealed significant differences between male and female grades 5–6 students in the use of language learning strategies as a whole. Female students showed that they used language learning strategies more frequently than male students did in general. Significant differences exist between male and female grades 5–6 students in the use of cognitive strategies, social strategies, association strategies and assistance strategies; while no significant differences exist in the use of compensation strategies and constructive learning strategies.

Research Question Three

What are the relationships between the use of language learning strategies and English learning experience, according to the following independent variables:
(a) years of studying English;
(b) years of studying English outside schools;
(c) years of living in English-speaking countries;
(d) experience of studying English in English-speaking countries;
(e) experience of traveling abroad;
(f) level of parental support; and
(g) general level of enjoyment in learning English?

(a) Years of Studying English

The results revealed significant differences between the years of studying English and the use of language learning strategies as a whole. For the relationship between years of studying English and the use of the six dimensions of language learning strategies, significant differences existed in cognitive strategies, social strategies, association strategies and compensation strategies. No significant differences existed in assistance strategies and constructive learning strategies.

(b) Years of Studying English outside Schools

Significant differences were found between the years of studying English outside schools and the use of language learning strategies as a whole. Significant differences also existed between the years of studying English outside the school and five out of the six dimensions of the language learning strategies, cognitive strategies, social strategies, association strategies, compensation strategies and constructive learning strategies; no significant differences existed between the years of studying English outside schools and assistance strategies.

(c) Years of Living in English-speaking Countries

Results revealed significant differences between the years of living in English-speaking countries and the use of language learning strategies as a whole. Significant differences also existed between the years of living in English-speaking countries and the use of language learning strategies in the dimensions of cognitive strategies, social strategies, association strategies and compensation strategies. There was no significant relationship between the years of living in English-speaking
countries and assistance strategies and constructive learning strategies.

(d) Experience of Studying English in English-speaking Countries

Results revealed no significant differences existed between the experience of studying English in English-speaking countries and the use of language learning strategies as a whole. Significant differences were found between the experience of studying English in English-speaking countries and the use of language learning strategies in the dimensions of cognitive strategies and association strategies. No significant differences existed between the years of experience of studying English in English-speaking countries and the use of language learning strategies in the dimensions of social strategies, compensation strategies, assistance strategies and constructive learning strategies.

(e) Experience of Traveling Abroad

Results revealed that significant differences existed between the experience of traveling abroad and the use of language learning strategies as a whole. Significant differences also existed between the experience of traveling abroad and the use of language learning strategies in the dimensions of cognitive strategies, association strategies and compensation strategies. No significant differences were found between the experience of traveling abroad and the use of language learning strategies in the dimensions of social strategies, assistance strategies and constructive learning strategies.

Results revealed significant differences existed between the experience of traveling in English-speaking countries and the use of language learning strategies as a whole. Significant differences were also found between the experience of traveling in English-speaking countries and the use of language learning strategies in the dimensions of cognitive strategies, social strategies, association strategies, compensation strategies and constructive learning strategies. No significant differences existed between the experience of traveling in English-speaking countries and the use of language learning strategies in the dimension of assistance strategies.
For the students who have no experience of traveling abroad, a T-test was performed to determine if differences existed between those who have plans to travel in the future, and those who do not have plans to travel in the future, in the use of language learning strategies. Significant differences were found between the effect of having plans to travel and the use of language learning strategies not only as a whole, but also in all six dimensions.

(f) Level of Parental Support

Results revealed significant differences between the level of parental support and the use of language learning strategies as a whole. Significant differences also existed between the level of parental support and the use of language learning strategies in all six dimensions, cognitive strategies, social strategies, association strategies, compensation strategies, assistance strategies and constructive learning strategies.

(g) General Level of Enjoyment in Learning English

Significant differences were found between the level of enjoyment in learning English and the use of language learning strategies, not only language learning strategies as a whole, but also language learning strategies in all six dimensions, cognitive strategies, social strategies, association strategies, compensation strategies, assistance strategies and constructive learning strategies.

Discussion

The language learning strategies that grades 5–6 elementary school students in Taipei, Taiwan, use were identified as six dimensions: cognitive strategies, social strategies, association strategies, compensation strategies, assistance strategies and constructive learning strategies. The average score of the participants was 2.93, medium use. Association strategies were used most frequently with a mean score of 3.27. These data reveal that grades 5–6 students in Taipei, Taiwan, used associating and applying most often in learning English as a foreign language. All dimensions of strategies are in medium use, which indicates that both adults and children use the language learning strategies when learning language.
Metacognitive learning strategies that appear in Oxford's (1990) book were missing in this study. The researcher originally intended to modify SILL into the appropriate instrument for this specific study by collecting the suggestions from the teachers, experts and students in Taiwan. The suggestions were to delete the items in SILL that were beyond the comprehension level of the grades 5–6 students in Taiwan. In those items, most of the metacognitive strategies were included. Metacognitive strategies, according to O'Malley et al. (1985) and Oxford (1990), help learners control their cognition. These strategies are selective attention, self-management, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement. The reasons given for the lack of metacognitive strategies among grade 5-6 students might be that the children in Taiwan did not possess the ability to apply metacognitive strategies. Perhaps grades 5–6 students are not mature enough in their cognitive development to learn and apply metacognitive strategies, or the teachers are not aware of the ability, or they themselves do not use metacognitive strategies. It could be the problem of age, physical and mental development, or of the social and cultural trends in Taiwan which lead to students, teachers and parents paying attention only to students' academic achievement rather than the metacognitive ability and creativity.

Gender differences were found in the use of language learning strategies. Female students were found to use more language learning strategies as a whole and in cognitive strategies, social strategies, association strategies, assistance strategies, and constructive learning strategies. This finding is consistent with the review of literature, which suggest that a significant relationship exists between gender and language learning strategies use (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Green & Oxford, 1995; Noguchi, 1991; Yang, 1992, 1993; Sy, 1994, 1995; and Sheorey, 1999). The research demonstrates that females use more strategies more frequently than males do. Most of the research subjects in the studies were university students, but in this research study, the subjects were grades 5–6 elementary school students. Gender difference exists in the use of language learning
strategies and may exist at a young age and may be inherent in children across culture.

The findings show that, in general, significant differences exist between English learning experience and the use of language learning strategies. Years of studying English, years of studying English outside of school and years of living in English-speaking countries were found to be significantly related to the use of language learning strategies. The finding was consistent with that observed by Oxford and Nyikos (1989) that a significant relationship was found between the years of study and the choice of language learning strategies. In addition, Watanabe (1990) concluded from his study that living abroad had certain effects on the learners' use of communication-learning strategies. However, Osanai (2000) addressed no significant correlation between the use of language learning strategies and years of studying English. In this study, it was found that the longer the students learn English, the more frequently they use language learning strategies. The finding revealed that exposure to the target language helps the use of language learning strategies. However, among the 932 subjects in this study, only 12.8% had the experience of living in English-speaking countries. Most of the subjects, 87.2%, had no experience at all. Not enough evidence was available to generalize the findings to a larger population.

No significant differences were found between the experience of studying English in English-speaking countries and the use of language learning strategies. This finding of the study was similar to that of Osanai (2000), who studied Asian and Latino students in US universities. He reported no significant correlation between the use of language learning strategies and length of stay in the United States. However, among the 932 subjects in the study, fewer than 10% have had the experience of studying English in English-speaking countries. Lack of sufficient evidence prevented generalizing the finding to a larger population.

The results of the study revealed significant differences between the experience of traveling abroad and language learning strategies as a whole, and in
the dimension of cognitive strategies, association strategies, and compensation strategies. No significant differences exist between the experience of traveling abroad and language learning strategies in the dimension of social strategies, assistance strategies and constructive learning strategies. Generally, the data show that, although some differences were not statistically significant, students who had more experience traveling abroad use language learning strategies more often than those who had no experience at all.

Significant differences were also found between the experience of traveling in English-speaking countries and the use of language learning strategies as a whole, and in five of the six dimensions. Students who had experience traveling in English-speaking countries, regardless of the number of times, used language learning strategies more often than those who had no experience. Among students who had no experience traveling, significant differences were found in the use of language learning strategies and the students who planned to travel in the future. Students who planned to travel in the future used significantly more language learning strategies than those who have no plans to travel. It is possible to attribute these findings to the global perspective that students have.

Traveling abroad opens a window on the world for the young students, and English is now the most commonly used language in the world. When students travel, they have the opportunity to expose themselves to English-speaking situations and to use English as a tool of survival or communication. It is possible that in that kind of situation, students realize the importance of English or are forced to use English. Because of their lack of proficiency, they have to use different strategies more frequently to overcome the difficulties they encounter. Those who have no experience traveling but plan to travel in the future might have prepared themselves for the situations they might encounter when they travel. Global perspectives they have might lead them to learn English, the best-known global language, and to enjoy traveling in the future.

Significant differences were found between parental support and the use of
language learning strategies as a whole and in six dimensions. Students who had
more parental support use language learning strategies more frequently than those
who had less parental support. Eighty-six percent of the subjects reported that
parents either supported or very much supported their English learning. This finding
indicates that most of the parents of grades 5–6 students in these selected schools in
Taipei, Taiwan, were aware of the importance of their children’s English proficiency
and supported their learning. The more the parents supported their children’s
English learning, the more language learning strategies the children used. The
reason might be that parents show support by helping students learn English at home,
registering students in private language learning institutions, encouraging or
reinforcing students’ English learning, or by discussing the importance of English
with the students. All of these measures motivate students to learn English. Research
suggests that a strong relationship exists between learning strategy use and
motivation (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Wharton, 2000; and Osanai, 2000). Oxford
and Nyiko (1989) stated that motivation was the most significant factor affecting the
use of language learning strategies. Parental support could be one factor in
motivation. Further and deeper research is needed in this topic.

The research results revealed significant differences between the level of
enjoyment in learning English and the use of language learning strategies, not only
language learning strategies as a whole but in all six dimensions, cognitive strategies,
social strategies, association strategies, compensation strategies, assistance strategies
and constructive learning strategies. Students who reported a higher level of
enjoyment in learning English used language learning strategies more frequently
than those with a lower level of enjoyment in learning English. The level of
enjoyment might be determined by the students’ English learning experiences or the
learning results and achievements. If the students’ experience of learning English
was pleasant, or they performed well or had a good learning result, it is reasonable
to say that the students would actively learn on their own. In other words, level of
enjoyment may be a factor in motivation. Again, motivation was the most
**IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Pedagogical Implications**

The study suggests several implications for the EFL teachers in elementary schools in Taipei, Taiwan.

First, language instructors and researchers must confront the existence of language learning strategies in all learners, regardless of age. Young language learners do apply language learning strategies in learning. Individual differences exist, and instructors and researchers need to confront and to utilize the differences to help language instruction. Language instructors and researchers should not only have the ability to teach the target language but also to know the language learning strategies and how to teach them.

Second, language instructors and researchers, before instruction in the target language, should understand students' language learning experience. Instructors and researchers shall identify the frequency and categories of students' use of language learning strategies before instruction in the target language. Understanding the students' use of language learning strategies and their language learning experience that affect language learning strategies means that language instructors could use this information as a reference to help instruction, identify the strategies that students use that are most effective for their language learning, and help students learn the language more efficiently and effectively.

Third, it is essential for male students to be made aware of the importance of language learning strategies. Language instructors should acknowledge the gender differences in the use of language learning strategies and encourage students to make a conscious effort to use various strategies. Students should be made of the broad range of language learning strategy options. Open discussions of learning strategies may be helpful for students to share with, and learn from, each other.
“Male and female students should be encouraged and allowed to develop the most effective learning approaches they can, and neither should be pushed into a gender-stereotyped set of strategies” (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995, p. 379).

Fourth, the findings suggest that students who study English for more years use language learning strategies more frequently than those who study for fewer years, no matter whether the students learn English in or outside of school. In other words, starting formal language instruction earlier may be helpful for students’ use of language learning strategies. Longer exposure to the target language and its instruction may consciously or unconsciously lead students to use language learning strategies gradually.

Fifth, it is important for language instructors to bring real-life situations to class. Language is a tool of communication and is used for exchanging thoughts and cultures. English is no exception. Students who had the experience of traveling used language learning strategies more frequently than those who had no experience traveling at all. Students can be encouraged to share their experiences or plans to travel in class and discuss how learning English can help them when traveling. Language instructors may create a travel-like environment in class, where students have to use English to communicate. Using authentic living experience as examples, and role-playing may be good ideas for language classes. Multimedia can be very helpful for language instructors today. Instructors can use all kinds of multimedia to interest students, to introduce different cultures and countries, and to cultivate students’ global perspective. Having a global perspective is believed to be extremely important in today’s world. With the motivation of traveling and understanding other people’s cultures, students can be made aware of the importance of English and the need to learn English, so that motivation for learning English will increase as will their use of language learning strategies.

At last, motivation may be a crucial factor affecting the use of language learning strategies. Although in this study motivation was not included as a main factor, several dependent variables, included in English language learning
experience, that were influential to the use of language learning strategies, could be referred to as part of motivation, such as level of parental support and general level of enjoyment in learning English. Language instructors have to understand students’ needs and responses in the class and provide the most appropriate and suitable instruction accordingly. By motivating students with the kind of language class they need and enjoy, students can have a pleasant experience; they will use more language learning strategies, which helps the learning result, and get the reward of learning as a result of language proficiency, which motivates them to learn. The effects are mutual, interrelated, and interconnected. As Osanai (2000) concluded in his research, “language instructors and language learners must always be aware of this three-way interaction—motivation, perceived proficiency, and strategy use” (p. 137).

**Recommendation for future research**

1. Replication of this study should be conducted nation-wide, with different age groups and a larger sample size. It would help in understanding whether differences exist between town and country, and among adults, teenagers and children in language learning. It would also help to understand the situation and characteristics of language learners in different groups.

2. Further research is needed to identify the use of metacognitive strategies for grades 5–6 students in Taipei, Taiwan. Wenden (1998) suggests that learners at different ages have acquired metacognitive knowledge. It is necessary to know the reason that metacognitive strategies were missed in the language learning strategies of grades 5–6 students in Taipei, Taiwan. It would also be very helpful to understand whether grades 5–6 students in Taipei, Taiwan use metacognitive strategies in learning other subjects and determine the possible reason of the lack of metacognitive strategies of the grade 5-6 students.

3. Further research is needed to clarify the relationship among proficiency, language learning experience, motivation and the use of language learning strategies. Identifying and using the relationship would greatly help facilitate
language instruction and learning.

4. It is important to understand the awareness and perception of language learning strategies that EFL teachers have. Only when the teachers are aware of and know language learning strategies can they teach and help students with the strategies.

**REFERENCE**


APPENDIX

基本資料

填答說明：各位小朋友，請在合乎你實際情況的方格內打勾，每一題都要填答喔！

1. 性別：□男 □女

2. 年級：□五年級 □六年級

3. 目前為止，我總共學英文：□0-2年 □2-4年 □4-6年 □6年以上

4. 我曾經在校外學英文：□是 □否
   學過：□1-2年 □3-4年 □4年以上

5. 我曾經在英語系國家住過：□是 □否
   住過：□1-2年 □3-4年 □4年以上

6. 我曾經在英語系國家上過英語課：□是 □否
   學過：□0-1年 □1-2年 □2年以上

7. 我曾經出國旅遊：□是 □否
   若答「是」的話，目前為止出國經驗：□1-2次 □3-4次 □4次以上
   到英語系國家的經驗：□1-2次 □3-4次 □4次以上
   若答「否」的話，我計劃未來要出國旅遊：□是 □否

8. 父母親支持學英文的程度：
   □非常不支持 □不支持 □沒意見 □支持 □非常支持

9. 綜合來說，我喜歡英文的程度：
   □非常不喜歡 □不喜歡 □沒意見 □喜歡 □非常喜歡
10. 跟班上同學比較 我認為自己的英文程度：

綜合來說 我的英文程度屬於： □很不好 □不好 □普通 □好 □很好

我的英文 聽的程度屬於： □很不好 □不好 □普通 □好 □很好
我的英文 說的程度屬於： □很不好 □不好 □普通 □好 □很好
我的英文 讀的程度屬於： □很不好 □不好 □普通 □好 □很好
我的英文 寫的程度屬於： □很不好 □不好 □普通 □好 □很好

跟以英文為母語的人比較 (例如美國人) 我認為自己的英文程度：

綜合來說 我的英文程度屬於： □很不好 □不好 □普通 □好 □很好

我的英文 聽的程度屬於： □很不好 □不好 □普通 □好 □很好
我的英文 說的程度屬於： □很不好 □不好 □普通 □好 □很好
我的英文 讀的程度屬於： □很不好 □不好 □普通 □好 □很好
我的英文 寫的程度屬於： □很不好 □不好 □普通 □好 □很好

11. 我對於學校英語課老師教學的方式：

□非常不喜歡 □不喜歡 □沒意見 □喜歡 □非常喜歡

我認為學校英語課老師教學的方式：

□非常不能幫助我學習 □不能幫助我學習 □沒意見 □能幫助我學習 □非常能幫助我學習

12. 我對於學校英語課的課程內容：

□非常不滿意 □不滿意 □沒意見 □滿意 □非常滿意

我認為學校英語課的課程內容：

□非常不能幫助我學習 □不能幫助我學習 □沒意見 □能幫助我學習 □非常能幫助我學習
英語學習策略研究問卷

選項說明：‘從不如此’—表示該敘述幾乎完全不符合你的情況
‘很少如此’—表示該敘述多半不符合你的情況
‘有時如此’—表示該敘述有一半符合你的情況
‘通常如此’—表示該敘述多半符合你的情況
‘總是如此’—表示該敘述幾乎完全符合你的情況

總從很有通
是不少時常
如如如 如 如
此 此 此 此 此

1. 我會用新學的單字造句, 加深記憶.........................1 2 3 4 5
2. 我會把英文單字的發音跟這個字的樣子或圖聯想
   以加深記憶.........................................................1 2 3 4 5
3. 我會想像會用到某個英文單字的可能情況, 幫助
   記憶單字............................................................1 2 3 4 5
4. 我會用相似的發音來記憶英文單字.............................1 2 3 4 5
5. 我用單字卡背英文單字...........................................1 2 3 4 5
6. 我用肢體語言幫我記憶單字.......................................1 2 3 4 5
7. 我時常複習英文功課..............................................1 2 3 4 5
8. 我會反覆練習說或寫英文生字.................................1 2 3 4 5
9. 我試著像以英語為母語的人一樣說英文.....................1 2 3 4 5
10. 我試著用英語交談..............................................1 2 3 4 5
11. 我看英語發音的電視節目或電影..............................1 2 3 4 5
12. 我讀英文書報當作娛樂消遣.................................1 2 3 4 5
13. 我用英文作筆記 留言 寫信或報告............................1 2 3 4 5
14. 讀英文時, 我先很快瀏覽過去, 然後再回頭仔細研讀....1 2 3 4 5
15. 我看到英文單字時，會想一想中文裡哪一個字有類似的意思...............................................................1 2 3 4 5
16. 我試著找出英文的句型.......................................1 2 3 4 5
17. 我避免一字一字翻成中文或英文.............................1 2 3 4 5
18. 我將所聽到或讀到的英文做摘要整理.........................1 2 3 4 5
19. 遇到不熟悉的英文字時，我會用猜的........................1 2 3 4 5
20. 在英文對話時，如果突然有單字想不起來，我會用.......
   比手畫腳的..........................................................1 2 3 4 5
21. 當我想不出合適的英文字時，我會自己發明新的單字....1 2 3 4 5
22. 讀英文時，我不會每個單字都去查字典....................1 2 3 4 5
23. 我會去猜別人下一句要說的英文..........................1 2 3 4 5
24. 當我想不出某個英文字時，我會利用其他意思類似的...
   字句..................................................................1 2 3 4 5
25. 每當我在英文上表現很好時，我會獎勵自己..............1 2 3 4 5
26. 我在學習語言的紀錄上，寫下自己的學習心得..............1 2 3 4 5
27. 假如在英語會話時，我有聽不懂的地方，我會請對方
   再說一次或說慢一點...............................................1 2 3 4 5
28. 說英文時，我會要求對方改正我的錯誤.....................1 2 3 4 5
29. 我會跟其他同學練習英文.........................................1 2 3 4 5
30. 我會向講英文的人尋求協助.....................................1 2 3 4 5
北市國小五六年級學童英語學習策略與學習經驗之研究

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摘要

本研究主要探討台北市國小五六年級學童之英語學習策略與學習經驗。研究對象為932位台北市國小五六年級學童。背景資料問卷及語言學習策略問卷同時被使用在此研究中。研究者發現，北市國小五六年級學童中度的使用六種不同的語言學習策略：認知學習策略、社交學習策略、相關學習策略、補償學習策略、輔助學習策略以及建構式學習策略。女性比男性使用較多的英語學習策略。而英語學習經驗大多都與語言學習策略有顯著相關，包括英語學習年資、校外英語學習年資、住在英語系國家之年資、在英語系國家學習英語之經驗、出國旅遊之經驗、父母親支持學習英語之程度及英語學習所帶來的愉悅程度。根據研究結果，本研究者建議語言老師們在教學之前，先對學生的背景以及其英語學習經驗有所瞭解，對語言學習策略有一定程度的概念，並幫助個別學生找到最適合他的學習策略，如此一來，才能達到有效的學習效果和對未來的語言學習有益的學習經驗。

關鍵詞： 語言學習策略，英語為外國語言之教育，外語教育，國民小學