English language learning strategies: A comparison between Muslim and Non-Muslim high school students

กลวิธีการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ: การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบระหว่างนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลายที่เป็นมุสลิมและนักเรียนที่ไม่ใช่มุสลิม

มูนีร แลฮะ[1]
Munir Laeha
นิสากร จารุมณี[2]
Nisakorn Charumanee

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อเปรียบเทียบกลวิธีการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษระหว่างนักเรียนที่มีภาษาแม่ต่างกัน คือ นักเรียนมุสลิมที่มีภาษาแม่เป็นภาษามลายูและนักเรียนที่ไม่ใช่มุสลิมที่มีภาษาแม่เป็นภาษาไทย งานวิจัยนี้ใช้วิธีการเลือกแบบเจาะจงกลุ่มตัวอย่าง คือ นักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 4 จำนวน 424 คน แบ่งเป็นนักเรียนมุสลิมที่มีคะแนนสูงจำนวน 209 คน และต่ำจำนวน 101 คน และนักเรียนที่ไม่ใช่มุสลิมที่มี

[1]นักศึกษาระดับปริญญาโท สาขาการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษานานาชาติ ภาควิชาภาษาและภาษาศาสตร์ คณะศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตหาดใหญ่
M.A. Student, Teaching English as an International Language, Department of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai Campus
[2]รองศาสตราจารย์ ดร. ภาควิชาภาษาและภาษาศาสตร์ คณะศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตหาดใหญ่
Associate Professor, Ph.D., Department of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai Campus

คะแนนสูงจำนวน 59 คน และต่ำจำนวน 55 คน โดยใช้คะแนน O-NET ในวิชาภาษาอังกฤษเป็นเกณฑ์ในการแบ่ง ผู้วิจัยเก็บข้อมูลโดยใช้เครื่องมือ 2 ชนิด คือ แบบสอบถาม Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) version 7.0 และการสัมภาษณ์กลุ่ม ผลที่ได้พบว่า นักเรียนในกลุ่มวิจัยเป็นผู้ใช้กลยุทธ์การเรียนภาษาในระดับปานกลางและนักเรียนที่มีคะแนนสูงทั้งสองกลุ่มใช้กลยุทธ์โดยรวมมากกว่านักเรียนที่มีคะแนนต่ำกว่า นักเรียนกลุ่มที่มีคะแนนสูงทั้งมุสลิมและที่ไม่ใช่มุสลิมมีการใช้ indirect strategies มากกว่า direct strategies และไม่พบความแตกต่างของระดับการใช้ ทั้งสองกลุ่มใช้ metacognitive มากที่สุด อย่างไรก็ตามกลุ่มนักเรียนมุสลิมที่มีคะแนนสูงใช้ memory และ social strategies มากกว่ากลุ่มที่ไม่ใช่มุสลิมอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ ผลแบบเดียวกันนี้ปรากฏเมื่อเปรียบเทียบนักเรียนที่มีคะแนนต่ำระหว่างกลุ่มนักเรียนมุสลิมและที่ไม่ใช่มุสลิมยกเว้นประเด็นการใช้ metacognitive ซึ่งนักเรียนมุสลิมระบุการใช้มากกว่าอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ จากผลการวิจัยอาจกล่าวได้ว่านักเรียนทั้งหมดมีแนวโน้มที่จะใช้ indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective, social strategies) และหลีกเลี่ยงการใช้กลยุทธ์ที่ซับซ้อน นักเรียนมุสลิมใช้กลยุทธ์แบบท่องจำ ในการเรียนรู้ภาษาในขณะที่นักเรียนที่ไม่ใช่มุสลิมมักใช้ social strategy

คำสำคัญ: กลวิธีการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ ผู้มีความสามารถสูง ผู้มีความสามารถต่ำ นักเรียนมุสลิม นักเรียนที่ไม่ใช่มุสลิม

Abstract

This study aimed to compare English language learning strategies (ELLSs) use between and within two different mother tongue groups: Muslims whose mother tongue was Melayu and non-Muslims whose mother tongue was Thai. Using purposive sampling, the subjects comprised 424 Mattayomsuksa 4 students; 209 high and 101 low

achiever Muslims, 59 high and 55 low achiever non-Muslims using Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) test scores of English. To access ELLSs, the study employed two instruments: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning for non-native speaker strategy assessment (SILL version 7.0) and group interviews. The results showed that these learners were moderate ELLSs users and the high achievers used more ELLSs than their counterparts. Both the Muslim and the non-Muslim high achievers used indirect strategies more than direct ones and no significant differences were found. Both used metacognitive the most; however, memory and social strategies were used significantly more by the Muslim than the non-Muslim high achievers. Similar results were found when comparing Muslim and non-Muslim low achievers except that the Muslim low achievers used metacognitive strategies more significantly. It can be concluded that most participants tended to develop their English language learning through indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective and social strategies) and to avoid complicated strategies. Muslim students preferred rote learning through memorization to acquire English, whereas the non-Muslims applied social strategies.

Keywords: English Language learning strategies (ELLS), high achievers, low achievers, Muslim, non-Muslim

Introduction

Over the last few decades, a massive number of studies in the field of second language acquisition have significantly shifted from

teachers and teaching towards learners and learning (Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Yabukoshi & Takeuchi, 2009; Nikoopour & Farsani, 2010). This has been coupled with attempts to distinguish between successful and unsuccessful learners and to identify what good learners do to help themselves learn better (Wharton, 2000). As a result, language learning strategies have become one of the most appealing issues to research in language learning (Maclntyre, 1994).

Strategies refer to the techniques used by learners to make learning easier, faster, more productive and more self-directed (Oxford, 1990). Some examples are remembering and retrieving information, guessing for meaning and using gestures to bridge the gap in communication, interacting with others using English as a means of communication, and dealing with emotions, as well as relaxing before speaking English. They also refer to the way students manage and schedule the learning of language inside and outside the classroom.

Revealed by extensive studies, language learning strategies have a significant impact on students' second language competencies, because the greater the variety of strategies students used, the more advanced they became (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). To put it simply, the nature of learning strategies is to give an advantage to students in adapting to different situations. Thus, students would have more benefit of knowing a wider range of English language learning strategies. Yet, not all of the learners favored the same strategies. For example, among those strategies classified by Oxford (1990), Chinese students who

cultivated rote learning were found to employ memory and compensation strategies (Quigquan et al., 2008) and due to social sensitivity, Iranian female students used social strategies the least (Khalil, 2005). However, differences in employing language learning strategies lie in many variables. Learning style, proficiency level, nationality, gender, ethnicity or language background have been found to be possible variables that can impact the choice of using LLSs (Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Park, 1997; Wharton, 2000; Gan et al., 2004).

Apart from those previous variables, ethnicity—in a broad sense—is bound to the cultural background and identity of one specific group of people in a society. Therefore, it undeniably constitutes behavioral and cognitive aspects of people (Liyanage et al., 2004). In addition, ethnicity covers and also refers to mother tongues or language background of leaners (Grainger, 1997) and it has also been found to have an impact which can influence learners' use of language learning strategies. For example, according to Grainger (1997), European students with more proficiency and background knowledge relating to English preferred to use social strategies, while Asian background students preferred to employ compensation strategies due to the lack of English competencies. However, in the Arabian context, the findings were inconsistent (Khalil, 2005; Gerami & Baighlou, 2011). It was found that even though female students had limited opportunities to socialize, they surpassed male students in employing overall language learning strategies due to better and more effective planning and management

(Khalil, 2005). The work of Shmais (2004) showed that male and female Palestinian university students used overall language learning strategies at a moderate level, reflecting a moderate degree of awareness towards English study at university. Based on the previous review, it can be concluded that students with different ethnicities tend to employ different strategies in language learning facilitation. However, the inconsistencies of those research findings have led to a call for more research replication.

Although language learning strategies have long been researched, an extensive study have been conducted in other contexts leaving the EFL context open for more exploration and investigation (Gan et al., 2004). Thus, this study aimed to investigate these groups of Muslim students who have Melayu as their mother tongue and non-Muslim students who possess Thai as their mother tongue. In the former group, socialization among male and female students was known to be limited by religious demands and was normally monitored by their families, schools and communities, while such socialization was allowed within the latter group. The study was also to explore their perceptions and to compare the English language learning strategies used between the two groups in order to understand whether they shared common strategies or used different ones. These could later be taken as guidelines in the learning and teaching of English in an educational context in which students with different ethnicities are found.

Research questions

1. What kinds of English language learning strategies do Muslim high and low achievers employ? Are there any significant differences between the two types of students?

2. What kinds of English language learning strategies do non-Muslim high and low achievers use? Are there any significant differences between the two groups?

3. Are there any significant differences between Muslim and non-Muslim high and low achievers in their use of English language learning strategies?

Methodology

Setting and participants

The study employed purposive sampling to investigate the participants whose characteristics were categorized as Muslim and non-Muslim based on participants' mother tongues. Two schools, categorized as large-sized schools, were chosen to represent them: Darussalam School, a private religious school representing Muslim high and low achievers; and Narathiwat School, a public school representing non-Muslim high and low achievers.

However, based on Hughes' stratification formula, only those learners whose English scores on O-NET (Ordinary National Educational Test) were in the top and bottom 27% qualified. Those in the top 27%

were considered as high achievers and those in the bottom 27% were considered as low achievers.

Therefore, out of a population of 733, there were 310 Muslim participants (209 high achievers and 101 low achievers) and 114 non-Muslim students (59 high achievers and 55 low achievers).

Instrumentation

To investigate the language learning strategies used, a self-reported five-point Likert scale was adapted from Strategy Inventory for Language Learning version 7.0 (SILL) invented in 1990 by Oxford (1990). The SILL questionnaire comprised 50 items, aiming to discover six dimensions of language learning strategies. *First*, memory strategies help learners to remember and retrieve new information. *Second*, cognitive strategies help learners to link between new and existing knowledge. *Third*, compensation strategies help learners to use language despite their knowledge limitations. *Fourth*, metacognitive strategies refer to techniques learners use to organize, plan and monitor their learning. *Fifth*, affective strategies refer to how learners control their emotions, attitudes, and motivations when they learn a language. *Sixth*, social strategies refer to interactions with others.

The adapted SILL questionnaire was translated into Thai and submitted to three experts to examine its content validity based on IOC or Index of Item-Objective Congruence (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1976), which later revealed the highest (1.00) score of validity. Then the

questionnaire was tried out on 40 students to test its reliability. The reliability of the questionnaire used in the study gained Cronbach's Alpha at 0.9, which can be considered as a high degree (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995).

The other instrument was a guided interview form. The interview session included 12 questions related to the previous six strategies. For example, "What do you do to memorize new words or phrases?", "How do you practice your skills; reading, writing, listening, and speaking?", "Do you spend some time outside of the classroom to study English?", and "What is your attitude to learning English? Have you ever told anyone how you feel about learning English?" Its content validity was checked by three experts.

Data Collection and Analysis

For data collection, the SILL was distributed to the population in both schools. The questionnaire was explicitly explained by the researcher and the students' supervisors. Later, with their supervisors, they were checked when they were returned. The percentages of the returned questionnaires were as follows: 98% of Muslim high achievers (*209 out of 213*), 95% of Muslim low achievers (*101 out of 106*), 86% of non-Muslim high achievers (*59 out of 68*), and 91% of non-Muslim low achievers (55 out of 60). Forty students volunteered to participate in the interview sessions including 10 Muslim high and 10 Muslim low achievers; and 10 non-Muslim high and 10 non-Muslim low achievers.

Data from the questionnaires and interviews were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

To analyze data from the questionnaire, the study adopted descriptive analysis as the statistical device in order to find mean scores, standard deviation and independent t-test to indicate whether there were any significant differences among participants of both groups. The questionnaire results were interpreted based on Oxford (1990). The following intervals were employed to interpret the mean scores from the questionnaires:

1. The mean score between 1.00-1.49 meant the least frequently used.
2. The mean score between 1.50-2.49 meant rarely used.
3. The mean score between 2.50-3.49 meant moderately used.
4. The mean score between 3.50-4.49 meant frequently used.
5. The mean score between 4.50-.5.00 meant the most frequently used.

Data from the interviews were categorized and summarized. They were interpreted qualitatively in a way to support the quantitative data from the questionnaire.

Results

1. Strategies used by Muslim high and low achievers

Table 1 shows that both high and low scorers fell only into the moderate level of overall strategy users. However, when scrutinized more deeply, Muslim high achievers used overall strategies more significantly (HM$\bar{x}$ = 3.03, LM$\bar{x}$ = 2.77). They were both found to fall into the moderate use range of direct and indirect strategies. Moreover, both groups reported using indirect strategies (*strategies that help students learn language indirectly*) more often than direct strategies (*strategies which contribute directly to language learning—deep processing*). However, as indicated, the high achievement students significantly outpaced their counterparts in the frequency use of both direct and indirect strategies.

Exploring deeper into specific strategies, all were found falling under *moderately used*. For the most used strategies, both groups employed metacognitive (HM$\bar{x}$ = 3.46, LM$\bar{x}$ = 3.13) and affective (HM$\bar{x}$ = 3.07, LM$\bar{x}$ = 2.77) strategies as the main ones (*e.g. finding out how to be a better learner of English and encouraging speaking English despite being afraid of making mistakes*). Again, the Muslim high achievers used them more significantly. Nevertheless, only four students in the interview were afraid of making mistakes in speaking activities.

Regarding the most and least used strategies, it was found that cognitive (HM$\bar{x}$ = 2.97, LM$\bar{x}$ = 2.66) were among the top strategies used by the high and low scorers, respectively (*e.g. using an English word in different ways* and *reviewing English lessons*), and compensation

strategies (*e.g. using gestures*) were ranked among the least used by Muslim students in both groups (HM$\bar{x}$ = 2.93, LM$\bar{x}$ = 2.66). Even though both used these strategies moderately, they were again employed more significantly by the high achievers, but were claimed by students in the interview session as being difficult to apply because of a lack of apt situations. For social and memory strategies, it was found that these were used less by both groups and had no statistical differences.

Memory strategies, ranging from using flash cards, reviewing English lessons before and after classes, memorizing new English vocabulary and sentences, were reported in the open-ended questions and interviews as frequently used by both groups of these Muslim students. In addition, listening to English music, watching soundtrack movies and English videos on YouTube were among the most interesting activities reported by Muslim learners in the interview sessions.

Table 1

Language Strategies	Learning	H-Muslim (n=209)		L-Muslim (n=101)		*t*	Sig(2-teiled)
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Strategies	Direct	2.93	0.66	2.69	0.58	3.11	0.00
	Indirect	3.15	0.76	2.89	0.58	3.16	0.00
Direct	Memory	2.88	0.70	2.73	0.60	1.80	0.07
	Cognitive	2.97	0.71	2.66	0.64	3.48	0.00
	Compensation	2.93	0.72	2.66	0.63	3.09	0.00

Language Strategies	Learning	H-Muslim (n=209)		L-Muslim (n=101)		*t*	Sig(2-teiled)
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Indirect	Metacognitive	3.46	0.87	3.13	0.68	3.43	0.00
	Affective	3.07	0.75	2.77	0.65	3.27	0.00
	Social	2.78	0.86	2.66	0.74	1.25	0.21
Total		3.03	0.68	2.77	0.54	3.37	0.00

2. Strategies used by non-Muslim high and low achievers

As indicated in Table 2, non-Muslim high achievers used overall strategies significantly more than the low achievers, yet based on the mean score both groups were reported to be moderate users of overall strategies used (HNM$\bar{x}$ = 2.97, LNM$\bar{x}$ = 2.57). Although both applied indirect strategies more than direct strategies, both kinds of strategies were used significantly more by the high achievers. Moreover, while scrutinizing specific strategies, the three strategies claimed to be used significantly more by non-Muslim high achievers were metacognitive, social and cognitive (*e.g. paying attention to English speaking, asking questions* and *reading in English*) (p = < 0.02).

Regarding the frequency of use, all strategies were grouped in a *moderate use* range, except cognitive strategies that fell into the *rarely use* range, as indicated by low achievement students (LNM$\bar{x}$ = 2.41).

Both similarly prioritized in using metacognitive strategies (*e.g. paying attention to someone speaking English*) to facilitate language

learning and were moderate users of this strategy. Yet again the high achievers employed it more significantly (HNM$\bar{x}$ = 3.27, LNM$\bar{x}$ = 2.72).

Apart from metacognitive strategies, cognitive and social strategies were among the top ones used more significantly by non-Muslim high achievers even though they were moderately used. However, it is noticeable that the low achievers rarely used either strategy. The top strategies among non-Muslim low achievers were memory and affective strategies even though they were used moderately.

As with Muslim students, surfing the Internet to read current news in simple English regarding gadgets, sports and movie stars, accessing English videos on YouTube to learn English, listening to English songs, and spending leisure time watching soundtrack movies were favorite activities reported by non-Muslim students in open-ended questions and the interviews.

Table 2

Language Strategies	Learning	H-NonMuslim (n=59)		L-NonMuslim (n=55)		*t*	sig (2-tailed)
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Strategies	Direct	2.92	0.45	2.52	0.42	4.87	0.00
	Indirect	3.05	0.59	2.63	0.57	3.87	0.00
Direct	Memory	2.64	0.53	2.66	0.56	0.16	0.88
	Cognitive	3.17	0.65	2.41	0.56	6.64	0.00
	Compensation	2.75	0.74	2.56	0.56	1.54	0.13

Language Strategies	Learning	H-NonMuslim (n=59)		L-NonMuslim (n=55)		*t*	sig (2-tailed)
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Indirect	Metacognitive	3.27	0.82	2.72	0.72	3.85	0.00
	Affective	2.77	0.66	2.59	0.65	1.47	0.14
	Social	3.01	0.71	2.55	0.70	3.47	0.00
Total		2.97	0.46	2.57	0.41	4.99	0.00

3. Comparison of strategies used by Muslim and non-Muslim high achievers

As shown in Table 3, both groups of high achievers shared various similarities and utilized differences of language learning strategies. Comparable to the Muslim high achievers, non-Muslim ones also used overall strategies moderately (HM$\bar{x}$ =3.30, HNM$\bar{x}$ =2.97). They mutually used indirect strategies more than direct ones. However, there were no significant differences between the two groups regarding the frequency in using either direct or indirect strategies. It was also found that only memory and affective strategies were used more significantly by Muslim high achievers.

To enhance language learning, high performers utilized metacognitive strategies more frequently than other strategies (*e.g. paying attention to someone speaking English*). Nevertheless, both Muslim and non-Muslim performers fell into the moderate user category of this strategy (HM$\bar{x}$ = 3.46, HNM$\bar{x}$ = 3.27). To further compare, other strategies found moderately used in both groups also produced no statistically

significant differences except for memory and affective strategies. Each of these was used more by the Muslim high achievers than the non-Muslim ones.

Apart from metacognitive and cognitive strategies (*e.g. finding out how to be a good English learner* and *practicing the sound of English*), affective and social strategies (*trying to relax to overcome fear of using English* and *asking people to repeat or slow down if they do not understand*) appeared among top strategies used by Muslim and non-Muslims alike. Furthermore, compensation and memory strategies were found to be among the least used strategies (*e.g. acting out to remember words and making up new words*) by high score learners.

Table 3

Language Strategies	Learning	H-Muslim (n=209)		H-NonMuslim (n=59)		*t*	sig (2-tailed)
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Strategies	Direct	2.93	0.66	2.92	0.45	0.19	0.85
	Indirect	3.15	0.76	3.05	0.59	1.03	0.31
Direct	Memory	2.88	0.70	2.64	0.53	2.74	0.01
	Cognitive	2.97	0.71	3.17	0.65	1.91	0.06
	Compensation	2.93	0.72	2.75	0.74	1.66	0.10
Indirect	Metacognitive	3.46	0.87	3.27	0.82	1.42	0.16
	Affective	3.07	0.75	2.77	0.66	2.71	0.01
	Social	2.78	0.86	3.01	0.71	1.83	0.07
Total		3.30	0.68	2.97	0.46	0.63	0.53

4. Comparison of strategies used by Muslim and non-Muslim low achievers

Muslim and non-Muslim low achievers were known to use overall strategies less frequently than the high achievers as shown in Tables 1 and 2. Yet, as indicated in Table 4, when these two groups were compared, they mutually fell into the moderate range (LM$\bar{x}$ =2.77, LNM$\bar{x}$ =2.57).

It could be reported that both attempted indirect more than direct strategies, but Muslim students used indirect strategies more significantly (LM$\bar{x}$ =2.89, LNM$\bar{x}$ =2.63). Furthermore, Muslim students used each individual strategy at a moderate level, while non-Muslim students rarely used cognitive strategies.

To learn English, both groups prioritized metacognitive, affective and memory strategies over the others (*e.g. finding out a better way to be a good English learner, remembering new words by thinking about situations in which they can be used, and overcoming fear when using English*). However, only metacognitive and cognitive strategies were used significantly differently between the two groups (P=<0.02).

Table 4

Language Strategies	Learning	L-Muslim (n=101)		L-NonMuslim (n=55)		*t*	sig (2-tailed)
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Strategies	**Direct**	2.69	0.58	2.52	0.42	1.89	0.06
	Indirect	2.89	0.58	2.63	0.57	2.71	0.01
Direct	Memory	2.73	0.60	2.66	0.56	0.75	0.45
	Cognitive	2.66	0.64	2.41	0.56	2.46	0.02
	Compensation	2.66	0.63	2.56	0.56	1.05	0.30
Indirect	Metacognitive	3.13	0.68	2.72	0.72	3.60	0.00
	Affective	2.77	0.65	2.59	0.65	1.69	0.09
	Social	2.66	0.74	2.55	0.70	0.88	0.38
Total		2.77	0.54	2.57	0.41	2.49	0.01

Summary of the results and discussion

1. Strategies used by Muslim high and low achievers

The study offers a pattern of English language learning strategies used by Muslim high and low achievers. The results revealed that the former group utilized overall strategies significantly more often than the latter group. It can be implied that the more proficiency the language learners possessed, the more strategies they tended to employ as was found in Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006), and that the more advanced the students were, the more the techniques available for them to use.

Another implication is that the results from both groups indicated the level of learners' awareness of using strategies. The results also showed their efforts and limitations in applying strategies even though the high scorers showed more awareness as it was found that not only overall strategies but also direct and indirect strategies were reported to be of high frequency use among high scorers. These results were consistent with many prominent studies. For example, Qingquan et al. (2008) investigated language learning strategies among first year Chinese students in a university in China and found that successful learners employed direct and indirect strategies more often than unsuccessful ones. Rubin (1975) also found that successful students utilized a wider range of strategies in language learning compared with unsuccessful students. Grainger (1997) found different strategies used by different ethnicities. While learners of Asian background tended to guess meaning, those with European and English-speaking backgrounds prioritized in using dictionaries and scheduling language learning.

Observing specific strategies use, Muslim students were found utilizing both similar and different strategies. Metacognitive and affective strategies appeared to be popular among these Muslim students. Both strategies were grouped as indirect strategies relating to managing, evaluating, monitoring, and dealing with unstable emotions. It indicated that students were aware of strategies in promoting language understanding indirectly—not only memorizing, creating structure, or guessing intelligently, but also by paying attention to English speaking,

finding ways to improve competencies, and looking for opportunities to use English. Another implication was that English was dominant in English class; therefore, it encouraged students to practice English both inside and outside the classroom. Students studied English before moving to high school, so, in the middle of this transition, they had to be more alert to strategies they used both consciously and unconsciously.

Social strategies were found to be the least used strategies among these students, although they were in the *moderate use* range. This depicted the limitation of interaction with those whose English was the medium of conversation. Based on the interviews, students were afraid of speaking English with their friends fearing that their friends might laugh or make fun of them if they made mistakes. This aroused students in turning to use affective strategies to increase motivation in speaking English. In addition, to explain the lack of social strategy among these students, it could be related to a study conducted in Kuwait (El-Dib, 2004) concerning Islamic contexts in which gender sensitivity plays an important role in society. The example was given of females having more limited opportunity than males to socialize with others due to cultural and religious demands. However, it also might be implied that there was a lack of opportunities to practice social strategies outside the classroom setting. Social strategies require spoken language, such as, asking for more information, help, and clarification. For these students, opportunities to socialize with people in English and to practice their language outside the classroom seemed to be limited.

2. Strategies used by non-Muslim high and low achievers

Non-Muslim high performers were found to use English language learning strategies more often than their counterparts. The former were moderate strategy users and the latter rarely used them. The assumption might be similar to those discussed in the previous section that the more proficiency, the more strategies students tended to employ. To further illustrate this point, Griffiths (2003) stated that the more advanced the proficiency of the students, the more strategies they tended to utilize in language learning. Furthermore, these high achievement students showed the characteristics of being active participants responsible for their own learning, as indicated by the degree of higher strategies they used as opposed to the low achievement students.

Looking at specific strategies, the non-Muslim students employed metacognitive strategies more than other strategies and as much as the Muslim students. However, the important factor that contributed to the different outcome of the study might be explained by the frequency or density in applying this strategy, which high achievement students used at a higher frequency.

Compared with their counterparts, the non-Muslim high achievers did not have to rely much on rote learning, which was considered a basic way of learning because of the background knowledge of English they already had or had accumulatively learnt and understood. For example, to recognize the word “unhelpful”, the high achievers might have only glanced at it and known what it meant by using their high

cognitive strategies to break it into prefix ‘un’, ‘help’, and suffix ‘ful’, but for the low cognitive strategies students, remembering was the only choice left.

The non-Muslim high achievement students used social more than affective strategies, while the low achievers used affective more than social strategies. Since the high achievers had more proficiency in language learning, it helped to be able to apply more social strategies when encountering even unexpected situations, while the low achievers had to overcome the fear of producing mistakes and they needed to ponder the compensation strategies.

3. Similarities and differences in employing English language learning strategies among Muslim and non-Muslim high and low achievement students

In order to develop their English language learning, most participants in the study reported employing and prioritizing metacognitive strategies ranging from finding opportunities to use English, noticing mistakes to improve them, organizing and scheduling time for practicing, monitoring their own language learning development, and evaluating their language learning process. The results were consistent with the study conducted by Saiyarin (2011). She found that students initially utilized metacognitive strategies. Unlike cognitive, compensation, and memory strategies, metacognitive strategies were not at a deep-level of L2 competencies—*strategies which involved learning cognitively and metacognitively,* so it

might be another assumption to propose why most students employed this strategy at a high level of frequency compared with other strategies.

The least favored strategies among the low achievement participants were cognitive strategies. The study conducted in Gaza (Shmais, 2004) showed that both groups of low performers were similarly found to hardly ever apply cognitive strategies in language learning, as opposed to the high achievement learners who applied them more frequently. To perform cognitive strategies, compared to metacognitive, requires deeper levels of competency. It is a deep strategy (Leaver et al., 2005) referring to relating new information to already existing knowledge. Some examples are speaking or writing in English, trying to imitate native speakers of English, avoiding translation to L1, using words in different ways, and writing notes in English. All of these specific strategies need English knowledge to some extent and since the high achievers possessed a higher level of English competency, they could use cognitive strategies more comfortably.

Memory strategies were utilized by Muslim more than non-Muslim students. Since English was the third and second language to Muslim and non-Muslim learners, respectively, acquiring new languages through memorization—*for example, remembering new words and sentences, using flashcards, and reviewing English lessons*—seemed to be easier than other strategies. Muslim students employed this strategy because it *required only the effort* to memorize and needed a smaller range of English knowledge compared to cognitive and compensation

strategies. Moreover, the less complicated nature of memory strategies (*effort to memorize*) gave students instant output, depending on the amount of effort they put in, which may have suited their situation of learning many languages at a time. In other words, to employ certain strategies as a short cut to embrace English as a third language and at a surface level of knowledge, Muslim students seemed to rely more on memory strategies than non-Muslim learners did.

Furthermore, non-Muslim high achievers used social strategies more. It can be explained by the sensitivity of religious demand because of which Muslim students, especially females, had limitations in socializing with others (El-Dib, 2004), thus, they may have become more reserved than the non-Muslim high achievers.

Implications of the study

Due to the fact that strategies can be transferable from teachers to students and students to students (Griffiths & Parr, 2001), the suggested implications will be related to classroom study. *First is explicit instruction.* Since it was found that learners from different ethnicities or with different mother tongues employ different strategies, teachers should provide learners with a set of strategies for them to practice ways to broaden their range of strategies. In other words, the activities, assignments and lessons should encourage students to use strategies that they normally use and some that they never used before both in and outside the classroom. *Second is strategy reflection.* Teachers may

conduct a self-report questionnaire to elicit learners' strategies based on their perceptions, and have them share and discuss how they used those strategies to accomplish the task or to practice English with other learners. *Third, the emphasis should be on low achiever students*. Both Muslim and non-Muslim low achievers used strategies less than their counterparts, thus teacher's modeling and evaluations are vital. *Fourth is the provision of a wide range of activities related to students' preferences.* Obviously, Muslim and non-Muslim students are interested in learning English by listening to music, watching films and videos from the Internet, so the selection of relevant forms or content of materials to suit learners' interest might be worth trying.

Limitations

The present study aimed to offer some evidence of the use of language learning strategies in six dimensions by Muslim and non-Muslim students living in the same environment (Narathiwat Province) to see if the aspect of ethnicity or mother tongue difference may have contributed to the different use of strategies. This study employed only purposive sampling based on characteristics of students. In addition, it used only SILL and accessed strategies in language learning merely through self-reported questionnaires and interviews. Therefore, a combination of methods as well as applying qualitative and quantitative formulas (Grainger, 1997) and replication should be encouraged.

References

Abu Shmais, W. (2004). *The English language learning strategies of An-Najah National University EFL Majors*. Retrieved from http://repository.yu.edu.jo:80/handle/ 123456789/530264.

Dörnyei, Z., & Taguchi, T. (2009). *Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration, and processing* (2nd ed.). New York, NYL: Routledge.

El-Dib, M. A. B. (2004). Language learning strategies in Kuwait: Links to gender, language level, and culture in a hybrid context. *Foreign Language Annals*, *37*(1), 85–95. doi:10.1111/j.1944-9720.2004.tb02176.x.

Gan, Z., Humphreys, G., & Hamp-Lyons, L. (2004). Understanding successful and unsuccessful EFL students in Chinese universities. *The Modern Language Journal*, *88*(2), 229–244. doi:10.1111/j.00267902.2004.00227.x.

Gerami, M. H., & Baighlou, S. M. G. (2011). Language learning strategies used by successful and unsuccessful Iranian EFL students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *29*, 1567–1576. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.399.

Grainger, P. R. (1997). Language-learning strategies for learners of Japanese: investigating ethnicity. *Foreign Language Annals*, *30*(3), 378–385. doi:10.1111/j.1944-9720.1997.tb02360.x.

Green, J. M., & Oxford, R. (1995). A closer look at learning strategies, L2 proficiency, and gender. *TESOL Quarterly*, *29*(2), 261–297. doi:10.2307/3587625.

Griffiths, C. (2003). Patterns of language learning strategy use. *System*, *31*(3), 367–383. doi:10.1016/S0346-251X(03)00048-4.

Griffiths, C., & Parr, J. M. (2001). Language-learning strategies: Theory and perception. *ELT Journal*, *55*(3), 247–254. doi:10.1093/elt/55.3.247.

Hong-Nam, K., & Leavell, A. G. (2006). Language learning strategy use of ESL students in an intensive English learning context. *System*, *34*(3), 399–415. doi:10.1016/j.system.2006.02.002.

Khalil, A. (2005). Assessment of language learning strategies used by Palestinian EFL learners. *Foreign Language Annals*, *38*(1), 108–117. doi:10.1111/j.1944-9720.2005.tb02458.x.

Leaver, B. L., Ehrman, M. E., & Shekhtman, B. (2005). *Achieving success in second language acquisition*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Liyanage, I., Birch, G., & Grimbeek, P. (2004). *Religion, ethnicity, and language learning strategies*. Educating: Weaving Reserch into Practice. Retrieved January 15, 2016 from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED493864.pdf.

Maclntyre, P. D. (1994). Toward a social psychological model of strategy use. *Foreign Language Annals*, *27*(2), 185–195. doi:10.1111/j.1944-9720.1994.tb01201.x.

Nikoopour, J., & Amini Farsani, M. (2010). On the relationship between language learning strategies and personality types among Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of English Students, 1*(1), 81-101.

O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. New York: Newbury House Publisher.

Oxford, R. L., & Burry-Stock, J. A. (1995). Assessing the use of language learning strategies worldwide with the ESL/EFL version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). *System*, *23*(1), 1–23. doi:10.1016/0346-251X(94)00047-A.

Oxford, R. L., & Ehrman, M. E. (1995). Adults' language learning strategies in an intensive foreign language program in the United States. *System*, *23*(3), 359–386. doi:10.1016/0346-251X(95)00023-D.

Park, G. P. (1997). Language learning strategies and English proficiency in Korean university students. *Foreign Language Annals*, *30*(2), 211–221. doi:10.1111/j.1944-9720.1997.tb02343.x.

Qingquan, N., Chatupote, M., & Teo, A. (2008). A deep look into learning strategy use by successful and unsuccessful students in the Chinese EFL learning context. *RELC Journal*, *39*(3), 338–358. doi:10.1177/0033688208096845.

Rovinelli, R. J., & Hambleton, R. K. (1976). *On the use of content specialists in the assessment of criterion-referenced test item validity.* Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED121845.

Rubin, J. (1975). What the "good language learner" can teach us. *TESOL Quarterly*, *9*(1), 41. doi:10.2307/3586011.

Saiyarin, R. (2011). *Language learning strategies used by students at different proficiency levels* (Master's thesis). Prince of Songkhla University, Songkhla, Thailand.

Wenden, A. & Rubin, J. (1987). *Learner strategies in language learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Wharton, G. (2000). Language learning strategy use of bilingual foreign language learners in Singapore. *Language Learning*, *50*(2), 203–243. doi:10.1111/0023-8333.00117.

Yabukoshi, T., & Takeuchi, O. (2009). Language learning strategies used by lower secondary school learners in a Japanese EFL context. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *19*(2), 136–172. doi:10.1111/j.1473-4192.2009.00221.x