



A Study of EFL Technological and Vocational College Students' Language Learning Strategies and their Self-Perceived English Proficiency

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Abstract

Research related to language learning strategies has prospered since the 1980s. The importance of language learning strategies in language learning has been proven and emphasized worldwide. Learners' language learning strategies are one of the key dimensions for successful language learning. EFL should be taken not only as a subject in school, but also as a prerequisite essential competency for the labor market. In Taiwan, the technological and vocational education system has a long history and plays an important role in cultivating highly professional human resources in Taiwanese economic and industrial development. However, due to the lengthy education system in Taiwan with entrance examinations and the high value Chinese place on one's academic performance, most of the students who choose to attend technological and vocational colleges tend to be those who do not perform well in academic subjects, including English. EFL in this system is a required subject that students, however difficult, still need to learn. There has only been limited research focusing on this specific group's learning of EFL. This paper researches the language learning strategies employed by Taiwanese technological and vocational college students, their self-perceived English proficiency and their interrelationship.

1 Introduction

One of the major goals of higher education is to cultivate students' attitudes, habits and competence as a lifelong learner. Knowles (1976) pointed out that teachers have to help learners develop the attitude and concept that learning is a lifetime process, and learners need to be equipped with the skills of self-directed lifelong learning. Applying the idea to language learning, language learning itself is a lifelong task, and language learning strategy is the skill for learners' self-directed language learning. According to Oxford's (1990) definition, language learning strategies refer to the specific actions, behaviors, steps or techniques that students use to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing and using the second language.

Research has shown that second language proficiency/achievement is related to language learning strategies (Bremner, 1999; Oxford, 1989). 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). 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 (Oxford, 1990). Thus, to facilitate the learners' language learning and to promote learner autonomy, language learning strategy is a key point for instructors to pay attention to.

Technological and vocational education has played an important role in the Taiwanese educational system for decades. The vocational education system is career-oriented, with the goal

of training manpower to meet the demands of national economic growth, industrial changes, social needs, and technological advancement (Ministry of Education, 2004). During the past decades, the technological and vocational system in Taiwan has already successfully cultivated many professionals who contribute greatly to their organizations and society. However, due to the system of university entrance examinations and the high value Chinese culture places on academic performance, most of the students who choose to attend technological and vocational colleges tend to be those who do not perform well in academic subjects. Better performing students usually do not choose technological and vocational education schools, but instead choose general universities to continue their higher education. Although the vocational education system has contributed much to the Taiwanese economy and successfully cultivated much human resources, it is still not students' first choice. According to the researcher's experience teaching in the vocational education system, students in this system possess low confidence and motivation in learning. Many of them even suffer low self-esteem because they think they are inferior to those in the universities. From this point of view, the researcher suggests that teaching students how to learn on their own, find the most effective way to learn, and raise their own interest and motivation in learning are very important issues that require special attention. Applying this to language learning, language learning strategy is certainly the tool and the shortcut to help the technological and vocational students learn English, not only for the present but also for lifelong learning of foreign languages.

With the trend towards globalization, Taiwanese society and industries demand that human resources are proficient in English. People fluent in English (reading, writing, speaking) have a decided competitive edge in the job market. Thus, in the technological and vocational education system, EFL is still a core required subject as it is in other education systems. Language is a living subject that evolves over time since people use it to communicate. For the sake of effective communication, language can be changed and modified to meet specific needs. In school, learners should not only learn the language but also be equipped with the skills to continue learning on their own in the future; language learning strategy is the skill they need in order to achieve this goal. However, only a few researchers have focused on this specific group of learners. The researcher intends to find out the language learning strategies employed by Taiwanese technological and vocational college foreign language students, their self-perceived English proficiency and their interrelationship. By doing so, the researcher aims to provide evidence to promote the importance and awareness of language learning strategies in the vocational and technological education system.

1.1 Purpose of the study

This research study has the following goals:

1. to identify the language learning strategies employed by the vocational college foreign language students.
2. to identify the vocational college foreign language students' self-perceived English proficiency levels.
3. to identify the relationships between the use of language learning strategies and students' self-perceived English proficiency level.

1.2 Research questions

The study was designed to examine the following questions:

1. What are the types and frequency of language learning strategies employed by vocational college foreign language students?
2. What are vocational college foreign language students' self-perceived English proficiency levels?

3. What are the relationships between students' language learning strategy use and their self-perceived levels?

1.3 Limitations of the study

This research study has the following limitations:

1. The subjects involved in this study represent only Taiwanese technological and vocational college students.
2. The number of subjects was limited to students who voluntarily participated in answering and completing the research instrument. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to a larger population.
3. Not all learners' language learning strategies were included in the study's questionnaire. The language learning strategies in this study were limited to those appearing in the study questionnaire.
4. The questionnaire does not describe in detail the language learning strategies a student uses in specific language tasks. All disadvantages of this survey technique were recognized.
5. The use of self-perceived proficiency in this study is limited and based on only the individual responder's perceptions.
6. The researcher was very careful to assure the sample group was representative of the population.

2 Review of literature

2.1 Definition of language learning strategies

In 1978, Bialystok first defined language learning strategies as "optional means for exploiting available information to improve competence in a second language" (p. 71). Rubin (1975) gave a definition of strategies 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). More specifically, Chamot (1987) defined language learning strategies 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 believes that appropriate language learning strategies could help learners gain self-confidence and improve proficiency.

MacIntyre (1994) emphasized 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 to 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).

2.2 *Good 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 in strategy use between good/effective learners and less effective ones.

In Rubin's later study (1981), she provided 14 practical and detailed strategies used by a successful language learner. In other words, Rubin stated that good language learners are those who:

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.

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 successfully" (p. 17).

2.3 *Categories of language learning strategies*

Rubin (1981) proposes a classification scheme that identifies major cognitive strategies that contribute directly to the language learning process and other strategies that contribute indirectly. Direct language learning strategies include clarification, verification, monitoring, memorization, guessing/inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, and practice. Indirect language learning strategies include creating practice opportunities and using production tricks such as communication strategies. The weaknesses of this classification scheme are: 1) there is no second language acquisition theory as a foundation and 2) Rubin used mostly interviews and diaries as research methodology. Therefore, it is not fair to generalize this classification scheme to all students.

Oxford (1990), drawing 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 strategies.

2.4 Proficiency and language learning strategies

Many studies show the relationship between proficiency and language learning strategies, and MacIntyre (1994) further emphasized that strategy use results from and leads to increased proficiency. Strategies are the causes and the outcomes of improved language proficiency. Bremner (1999) called for more investigation of MacIntyre's conclusion.

McGroarty (1987) surveyed university students learning Spanish and Japanese. She found that language achievement was related with classroom strategies demonstrating cognitive rehearsal. Rossi-Le (1989) studied 147 adult ESL students in the United States and found that language proficiency level could predict strategy use.

In two separate studies, Abraham and Vann (1987) and Vann and Abraham (1990) reported that learners who were less proficient were using strategies considered as useful, and are often the same strategies used by learners who were more proficient. They claimed that the difference between successful and less successful learners was the degree of flexibility the learners showed when choosing strategies, and the learners' ability to appropriately apply strategies in their own learning situation.

In Watanabe's (1990) study of university and college EFL students in Japan, it was found that generally, students who had higher self-rated proficiency used most SILL strategies more frequently than those with lower self-rated proficiency. Rost and Ross (1991) indicated that students with different levels of language proficiency make different use of certain strategies. The more proficient students differed from the less proficient students in their cognitive level.

Phillips (1991) used SILL and TOEFL scores to investigate the relationship between adult ESL students' language learning strategies and proficiency. Phillips reported strong relationships between ESL/EFL SILL frequencies and English proficiency levels. Oxford, Park-Oh, Ito and Sumrall (1993a, b), studying 107 high school students of Japanese, also reported a significant relationship between strategy use and language achievement scores.

Park (1994) also used SILL to investigate the relationship between strategy use and proficiency in Korea. In this study, standardized test scores—TOEFL scores—were used to measure proficiency. Park indicated a linear relationship between strategy use and language proficiency.

Oxford and Ehrman (1995) studied 520 adult learners in the US. The learners in this study were highly educated and motivated. Oxford and Ehrman tried to explore "the use of learning strategies as an important factor in the success of adult learners of foreign languages" (p. 359). As a result, they reported a low but significant correlation between cognitive strategy use and speaking proficiency.

In Green and Oxford's (1995) Puerto Rico study, they found that the more successful learners reported using more language learning strategies frequently than less successful learners. They then suggested a causal ascending spiral relationship between level of proficiency and language learning strategies: "active use strategies help students attain higher proficiency, which in turn makes it more likely that students will select these active use strategies" (p. 288). Concluding the previous studies, Bremner (1999) argued the relationship between proficiency and strategy use might be that strategies are "simply features" of proficiency, which means that "only by reaching a certain level will a student be likely to use a given strategy" (p. 495).

Park (1997) investigated the relationship between language learning strategies and L2 proficiency in Korea university students. SILL was used to measure language learning strategies, and the score of Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) was used as an indicator of students' proficiency. Park reported a linear relationship between language learning strategies and L2 proficiency. All six categories of language learning strategies in SILL were significantly correlated with the TOEFL scores, and among the six categories, cognitive and social strategies

were most predictive of Korean university students' TOEFL scores.

Chamot and El-Dinary (1999) investigated the learning strategy applications in elementary students learning French, Japanese, and Spanish in immersion classrooms. They reported no differences in total strategy use between effective and less effective students, but noted that there were some differences in the types of strategy students used when reading in the target language. Effective students used more background-knowledge strategies, and less effective students used more phonetic decoding strategies. They also discussed the possibility that less effective learners focus too much on details instead of on seeing the task as a whole.

In Sheorey's (1999) study of Indian college students' language learning strategy use, he found that students with higher proficiency used language learning strategies more frequently than those with lower proficiency, especially in the use of functional practice strategies.

In his study of language learning strategies and proficiency involving 149 students who were primary teachers, Bremner (1999) conducted two analyses, taking proficiency as the independent variable and strategy use as the dependent variable, and using proficiency as the dependent variable, and strategy use as the independent variable. He reported significant relationships between proficiency level and strategy use, especially compensation strategies, social strategies and mostly, cognitive strategies. He also reported, "no clear indication of causality in one particular direction" between proficiency level and strategy use (p. 504).

In Osanai's (2000) study of 147 foreign students in universities in the United States, he found self-rating proficiency was significantly correlated to the use of language learning strategies. In Wharton's (2000) study of university students' language learning strategies, he reported that students who rated their proficiency as "good" and "fair" used more SILL strategies significantly more often than those who rate their proficiency as "poor". He further concluded "... a linear relationship between proficiency level and the reported frequency of use of many strategies" (p. 231), and "[t]he relationship is two way, however, with proficiency affecting strategy use and vice versa" (p. 232).

According to the above review of literature, it appears learners with higher proficiency use language learning strategies more often than those with lower proficiency. Wharton (2000) argued that it does not "indicate that learners become more effective strategy users as their L2 proficiency increases" (p. 208). He stated it is possible "that only successful language learners progress to advanced-level courses, with weaker ones simply dropping out" (p. 208).

2.5 Studies related to Taiwanese college students' language learning

Huang (1984) found that Chinese EFL learners shared similar learning strategies in oral communication as Western second language learners. Yet Huang indicated that some strategies used by Chinese EFL learners were influenced by Chinese culture, such as emphasis on memorization. Later in 1991, Chang studied 50 Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese ESL students in a university in the USA. Chang found that students who reported higher proficiency level used language learning strategies more frequently than students who reported lower proficiency level. Chang (1991) also reported that learners in humanities and social sciences used language learning strategies more often than learners in science.

Yang (1992) studied second language learners' beliefs about language learning and their use of learning strategies among 502 college students of English in Taiwan. Students reported using formal oral practice strategies and compensation strategies most frequently. 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, affective and social strategies.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

The sample population of this research study comprises 419 Taiwanese vocational college students, who major in Applied Foreign Languages. The instrument of this study includes two sections of questionnaire: the Background questionnaire and SILL (Strategy Inventory of Language Learning). The questionnaire was distributed to assess students' background information, including their self-perceived proficiency, and language learning strategies used in English learning.

3.2 Instrument

Two sections of questionnaires were used in this study, the background information questionnaire and the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) Version for speakers of other languages learning English (ESL/EFL) (Oxford, 1990). The background information questionnaire was developed by the researcher in order to understand the subjects' demographic information and self-perceived English proficiency. It was used as a primary instrument for this study. The questionnaire consisted of 50 close-ended questions with the five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. SILL has been conducted 40 to 50 times, with approximately 9,000 language learners involved since it was developed (Green & Oxford, 1995). Considerable evidence shows that SILL is valid and reliable (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). The social desirability of SILL is also tested and no fakability is shown. In order to minimize possible error because of students' varying levels of English comprehension, a Chinese version of the questionnaire was used, with the Chinese version of SILL administered by ESL/EFL and translation experts to prevent any translation mistakes. The reliability of the SILL, as assessed by Cronbach alpha for internal consistency, was .9444. For the six categories of language learning strategies, Cronbach alpha was between .7343 ~ .8732.

3.3 Data collection

The sample population in this study consists of 419 Taiwanese vocational college students who major in Foreign Languages in Taipei, Taiwan. The researcher randomly chose one college as an example. The researcher went to the classes, explained the purpose of the study and the instructions, and asked if there were any questions or concerns. After distributing the questionnaires, the researcher gathered the responses and used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows, a statistical program, for data analysis.

3.4 Data analysis

The data collected was coded and entered into a computer by optical scoring, and analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, standard deviations and percentages, were reported in order to understand the learners' language learning strategies use. 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-tests and one-way ANOVA were used to determine the effects of gender and self-perceived English language proficiency 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 $p < .05$. A bivariate correlation was performed to determine the relationship between learners' self-perceived proficiency and their use of language learning strategies.

3.5 Participants

The participants of this research study were 419 Taiwanese vocational college students majoring in Applied Foreign Languages. The researcher randomly selected a vocational college in Taiwan and a total of 430 participated in this study. All unusable questionnaires, i.e. those which were either incomplete or where instructions were not followed, were identified and discarded. As a result, 419 respondents (97% of four hundred and thirty cases) were used as the basis for data analysis.

Of the 419 subjects, 24.1% are males, and 75.9% are females. The age/grade distribution of the subjects is almost even, around 20% of each grade.

4 Findings and discussion

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Research question one

What are the language learning strategies employed by the vocational college foreign language major students?

The result indicates that the mean score of the participants' language learning strategy use is 2.86, medium use. In the six categories of language learning strategies, the participants reported using social learning strategies the most, and memory strategies the least. However, all categories of the strategy use are in medium use. The frequency of direct strategies usage, including memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, lies between 2.65 and 2.93; meanwhile, indirect strategies usage, including metacognitive, affective and social learning strategies, lies between 2.77 and 3.04. One can see that the students' use of direct strategies is relatively lower than indirect strategies.

	N	Mean	SD	Rank
LLS as a whole	419	2.86 (medium use)	.51	N/A
Factor 1: Memory Strategies	419	2.65 (medium use)	.52	6
Factor 2: Cognitive Strategies	419	2.82 (medium use)	.59	4
Factor 3: Compensation Strategies	419	2.93 (medium use)	.63	3
Factor 4: Metacognitive Strategies	419	3.01 (medium use)	.67	2
Factor 5: Affective Strategies	419	2.77 (medium use)	.68	5
Factor 6: Social Learning Strategies	419	3.04 (medium use)	.73	1

Table 1: Summary of the use of language learning strategies

4.1.2 Research question two

What are the vocational college foreign language major students' self-perceived English proficiency levels?

	Number	%	Cumulative %
Very Bad	26	6.2	6.2
Bad	92	22.0	28.2
Medium	268	64.0	92.2
Good	32	7.6	99.8
Very Good	1	0.2	100.0
Total	419	100.0	

Table 2: Subject's profile according to self-perceived English proficiency level in general

The table above indicates that more than half of the participants think their English proficiency is in a medium level. 38.2% of the participants evaluate their own English proficiency as bad or very bad; only 7.8% of them think their proficiency is good or very good.

4.1.3 Research question three

What are the relationships between students' language learning strategy use and their self-perceived levels?

Dimension	Learners' self-perceived English proficiency level	N	Mean	SD	F	P (Sig.)	Post hoc Tests Scheffe
LLS as a whole	1. Very Bad	26	2.43	.51	33.48	.00*	
	2. Bad	92	2.55	.42			
	3. Medium	268	2.93	.45			
	4. Good	32	3.40	.44			
	5. Very Good	1	4.80				
Memory strategies	1. Very Bad	26	2.31	.51	18.00	.00*	
	2. Bad	92	2.41	.45			
	3. Medium	268	2.72	.48			
	4. Good	32	2.96	.54			
	5. Very Good	1	4.77				
Cognitive strategies	1. Very Bad	26	2.30	.52	40.93	.00*	
	2. Bad	92	2.43	.50			
	3. Medium	268	2.91	.50			
	4. Good	32	3.50	.47			
	5. Very Good	1	4.85				
Compensation strategies	1. Very Bad	26	2.66	.67	9.27	.00*	
	2. Bad	92	2.70	.59			
	3. Medium	268	2.98	.60			
	4. Good	32	3.22	.65			
	5. Very Good	1	4.83				
Metacognitive strategies	1. Very Bad	26	2.53	.76	23.42	.00*	
	2. Bad	92	2.68	.59			
	3. Medium	268	3.08	.59			
	4. Good	32	3.67	.67			
	5. Very Good	1	4.88				
Affective strategies	1. Very Bad	26	2.37	.65	13.41	.00*	
	2. Bad	92	2.49	.66			
	3. Medium	268	2.84	.63			
	4. Good	32	3.21	.71			
	5. Very Good	1	4.83				
Social strategies	1. Very Bad	26	2.58	.81	16.31	.00*	
	2. Bad	92	2.75	.65			
	3. Medium	268	3.10	.67			
	4. Good	32	3.70	.71			
	5. Very Good	1	4.50				

$p < .05$

Table 3: Summary of one-way ANOVA for the effect of English proficiency level on the use of language learning strategies

One-way ANOVA was performed to determine the relationships between the use of language learning strategies and self-rating English proficiency in general. Results revealed significant relationships between the self-rating of English proficiency in general and the use of language learning strategies as a whole, and in all six categories of language learning strategies.

	LLS	Mem.	Cog.	Comp.	Meta.	Affe.	Soc.	Proficiency
LLS	1.000							
Mem.	.774**	1.000						
Cog.	.919**	.705**	1.000					
Comp.	.639**	.395*	.539*	1.000				
Meta.	.883**	.599**	.762**	.477**	1.000			
Affe.	.758**	.492**	.595**	.404**	.621**	1.000		
Soc.	.795**	.478**	.649**	.400**	.707**	.633**	1.000	
Proficiency.	.472**	.351**	.510**	.258**	.410**	.318**	.351**	1.000

**Correlations are significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlations are significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Summary of Correlations between LLS and self-perceived proficiency

A bivariate correlation was performed to determine the relationships between the learners' language learning strategy use and their self-perceived proficiency. Statistical analysis shows significant positive correlations between self-perceived proficiency and the use of language learning strategies.

4.2 Discussion

Based on the results of the data analysis, the researcher developed the following discussion matching the sequence of the research questions.

1. What are the language learning strategies employed by the vocational college foreign language students?

The participants in this research are reported to be moderate users of language learning strategies, with a mean score of 2.86. The result indicates that the participants use social learning strategies most frequently, with a mean score of 3.04, and memory strategies least frequently, with a mean score of 2.65. The result of the mean scores implies that the use of strategies is just in between "2. usually not true of me," "3. somewhat true of me," and "4. usually true of me,". This means that even though the students use all six types of language learning strategies, the frequencies are just at a moderate level. This result is different from that found in previous research done by Politzer (1983). Politzer reported that Asian students preferred rote strategies, such as memorization, and Hispanic students used more social interactive strategies. Politzer and McGroaty (1985) reported similar findings that Asian students were less likely to engage in certain communication-type strategies than Hispanic students. In addition, Noguchi in 1991 studied Japanese high school students' language learning strategies use, and found that social strategies were used least frequently. However, Wharton (2000) examined the language learning strategy use of university students in Singapore, and indicated a high mean and ranking of social strategy use. His result is similar to that found in this study. Thus it could be assumed that in the past decades, students' use of language learning strategies have changed. The researcher surmises this change of high use of social strategies in language learning might be due to the development of the Internet and World Wide Web. This development might stimulate the interaction and communion between western and eastern cultures, which might also lead to many different social changes such as the way a language is learned. The development of the Internet and its influence on culture and education warrants further research.

2. What are the vocational college foreign language students' self-perceived English proficiency levels?

More than 60% of the participants perceived their own English proficiency level as just okay. Very few of them think their own proficiency level is good or very good. This finding might be a result of the Chinese culture's value of modesty, or a lack of self-confidence. The evaluation basis of their self-perception of English proficiency also needs to be taken into consideration.

Further studies are needed to investigate the differences between students' self-perceived proficiency levels and their objective proficiency levels, which perhaps could be evaluated via a strict and widely recognized standardized test such as TOEFL or TOEIC.

3. What are the relationships between students' language learning strategy use and their self-perceived proficiency levels?

The research result revealed that significant differences exist between the students' self-perceived English proficiency level and the use of language learning strategies as a whole and in all six categories of language learning strategies. Students who reported a higher self-perceived English proficiency level use language learning strategies more frequently than those who had a lower self-perceived English proficiency level. The statistical analysis also reveals a positive correlation between students' language learning strategy use and their self-perceived proficiency levels, not only in the overall strategy use, but also in all six categories of strategies. The findings of this study confirm the literature review. Researchers indicate a positive linear relationship between the self-perceived proficiency, and the ranges and frequency of language learning strategy use (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Green & Oxford, 1995; Wharton, 2000). In addition, researchers also report a casual ascending spiral relationship between levels of proficiency and language learning strategy use (MacIntyre, 1994; Green & Oxford, 1995). In conclusion, the relationship between proficiency level and strategy use is defined, and strategies could be both the causes and the outcomes of improved language proficiency.

5 Recommendations

The discussion drawn from the findings of the study suggest several recommendations for instructors in the field of language teaching for vocational college students in Taipei, Taiwan.

1) Language instructors and learners should understand both language learning strategies and the relationships between language learning strategies and proficiency. They need to confront the importance of language learning strategies in language learning. Only when the content is understood and the importance is emphasized can language learning strategies be made good use of. Moreover, language instructors should know not only how to teach the language but also how to teach language learning strategies, so that language instruction becomes more effective and efficient

2) It is important to identify students' use of language learning strategies, including the types and the frequency, before or during the course. By doing so, the instructors will be able to offer the most appropriate courses to suit the students' needs and levels, and eventually achieve the best teaching and learning results.

3) Since social strategies are identified as the most commonly used strategy category in this study, language instructors, schools, and education authorities should pay more attention to this trend, and offer various opportunities for students to utilize strategies in their language learning. Furthermore, instructors should focus not only on the strategies that students originally employ, but also raise the students' awareness of other strategies they use less frequently or not at all.

4) Schools and universities should be able to provide or have access to information for language instructors' in-service education courses for language learning strategies. Instructors

should provide language learners with strategy training courses, or integrate strategy training in regular language courses.

5) The positive correlation between learners' use of language learning strategy and their self-perceived proficiency is confirmed. In other words, the more frequently the strategies are used, the higher the proficiency of the learners. Instructors should encourage and monitor learners' strategy use and provide necessary suggestions.

6) Needs assessments and learners' satisfaction surveys should be done regularly in order to determine the technological and vocational students' needs, and what courses and/or teaching methods should be modified. By satisfying learners' needs in language learning and teaching them in the manner they desire and need, learners' motivation can be enhanced, thus facilitating the teaching and learning process for both instructors and learners.

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