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## Motivation and Choices of Language Learning Strategies of Undergraduate Students in International College, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate whether there is a difference in six direct and indirect English learning strategies used by undergraduate students with different degrees of motivation. The participants consisted of undergraduate students in International College, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. A total of 286 questionnaires were completed and returned. The adapted Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) was used to assess the degree of motivation of participants in learning English. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0, was used to examine the participants' use of language learning strategies. The data were analyzed by calculating descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations, and frequencies. The data were analyzed by using a t-test to compare the data within each group and across groups at the significance level 0.05. The findings showed that there were significant differences at the 0.01 level between the means of the two degrees of motivation of students regarding their use of English language learning strategies. Therefore, it could be concluded that there is a difference in undergraduate students' use of six direct and indirect English learning strategies in each degree of motivation. Undergraduate students who had different degrees of motivation, medium and high, used English language learning strategies differently.

**Keywords :** EFL Students / Language Learning Strategies / Motivation / Thai Context

### Statement of the Problem

English is the universal language used for communicating and gaining the world's information and knowledge in a variety of fields for business, education, communication, and entertainment. However, English plays different roles in each country. Many countries use English as a first language. In some countries, English is used as a second or foreign language. The demand for learning English as a second and foreign language is increasing. In addition, the demand for speakers with high proficiency in English is dramatically increasing in every country, including Thailand. Education Ministry has declared that English is to be used as a foreign language in Thailand.

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Thailand has recognized the importance of English and has pursued a policy of learning for international advancement. Thai students learn English for 12 years, from primary school up until completion of secondary school. Despite the fact that English is vital and that Thai students learn English for years, only limited success in learning English has been achieved in Thailand (Chulalongkorn University Academic Service Center, 2008).

Several key educators have attempted to find out the main reasons of unsuccessful learning English language in Thailand. One of the main reasons may derive from teaching and learning approach. Moreover, they have investigated the most appropriate and proficient teaching and learning of English. Chamot (2004), Cook (2008) and Gohsh (2003) addressed that learners and learning are more emphasized than teachers and teaching, as the learners or students are the most important factor in the language learning process. According to many studies, learner success in learning the English language as a second or foreign language might not only rely on teaching strategies. The reason that can answer the question why some classroom tasks or activities are much easier for some students than for others is relevant to learners' use of language learning strategies to assist them to achieve their goals.

Many studies have concentrated on determining the connections between choice of strategy and factors that influence language learning strategy use (Chamot & Keatley, 2004; Kato, 2005; Liu, 2004; Wu, 2008; Yang, 2007; Zhao, 2009). Such studies have claimed that the variables of gender, age, motivation, language proficiency, and language learning experience, goals, and style affect learners' selection of language learning strategy. Among various factors, including language learning strategies, motivation is cited as vital in affecting language learning (Dornyei, 2001; Gardner, 2007). Furthermore, it has been found that motivation has a direct effect on language achievement (Gardner, 2007). Therefore, a study focusing on both language learning strategy use and the factors contributing to the choice of each strategy is beneficial for students, teachers, and educators, and provides useful insights into improving English language learning and proficiency. Due to the reasons mentioned above, this study attempted to explore the first year students' language learning strategy use and related factor, motivation. The results may use as a guideline for development of teaching and learning English, particularly in the Thai context.

Motivation is one of the most important factors for success in language learning. There are four kinds of motivation, integrative, instrumental, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Integrative motivation refers learning a foreign language in order to integrate with native speakers. Learners are interested in communicating with people and learning about their culture and language. Instrumental motivation is the motivation that language becomes a tool that allows you to achieve some goal such as passing their language exam or getting a job

promotion. Intrinsic motivation refers to behavior that is driven by internal rewards. In other words, the motivation to engage in a behavior arises from within the individual because it is intrinsically rewarding. This contrasts with extrinsic motivation, which involves engaging in a behavior in order to earn external rewards or avoid punishments. Extrinsic motivation occurs when learners are motivated to learn a language because someone else is either going to reward you or penalize you for it. Whereas intrinsic motivation tends to correlate with long-term success, extrinsic is linked to more short-term gains.

Moreover, the results of a number of the studies concerning language learning strategy use and related factors revealed that there is a positive relationship between the frequency of students' use of language learning strategies and their degree of motivation in learning English. In addition, there is a significant difference in language learning strategies used by students with different degrees of motivation (Kato, 2005; Liu, 2004; Wu, 2008; Yang, 2007; Zhao, 2009). In other words, students with different degrees of motivation tend to use different language learning strategies.

For instance, in Thai context, Tirabulkul (2005) and Pawapatcharandom (2007) investigated language learning strategy use in Thammasat and Mahidol University, Bangkok, by using the 5-item SILL questionnaire by Oxford (1990). The study revealed that Metacognitive category was the highest strategy use while Memory and Compensation strategy was employed least frequently. Moreover, it was found that highly proficient students employed Metacognitive strategies most frequently. Similarly, Lamatya (2010) investigated English learning strategies employed by Grade 11 Thai students with different levels of English achievement by using Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The results revealed that the strategy used the most frequently was the Metacognitive strategy category. The least frequent strategy use was the Memory strategy category. Many studies have indicated that language proficiency level, motivation degree, and language learning strategy use were relevant. There is also a positive relationship among three of them. Therefore, this study aimed to discover whether there is a difference in six direct and indirect English learning strategies used by undergraduate students with different degrees of motivation.

### Objectives

This research aimed to discover whether there is a difference in six direct and indirect English learning strategies used by undergraduate students with different degrees of motivation.

## Methodology

### 1. Sample

The participants of this study consisted of undergraduate students including freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors studying in International College, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. According to the preliminary survey, the number of the undergraduate students was approximately 80 students. However, the researcher distributed 300 questionnaires to the students. A total of 286 questionnaires were completed and returned.

### 2. Instruments

The researcher employed survey design with a questionnaire consisting of three parts: personal and educational information, language learning strategy use, and language learning motivation. Personal and educational information made up the first part of the questionnaire. Second, the adapted Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) was used to assess the degree of interest and motivation of participants in learning English. The final part, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0, was used to examine the participants' use of language learning strategies. The researcher received permission to use the SILL and AMTB from their respective authors, Rebecca Oxford and Robert Gardner. The following were the details of instruments:

#### 2.1 Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB)

The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) was developed by Gardner (1985) to assess various individual difference variables based on the socioeducational model. According to Gardner (1985), the AMTB was designed to assess the nonlinguistic goals of a second language program. These nonlinguistic goals "emphasize aspects as improved understanding of the other community, desire to continue studying the language, and interest in learning other languages" (Gardner, 1985, p.1) in contrast with the linguistic goals that focus on developing "competence in the individual's ability to read, write, speak, and understand the second language" (Gardner, 1985, p.1) and which can be evaluated by a quantity of tests designed to assess these skills. Adaptations of the AMTB have been used in many studies of L2 motivation. The AMTB is made up of over 130 items, and its reliability and validity have been supported (Gardner & Glikson, 1982; Gardner & Macintyre, 1993).

As the original AMTB was designed for Grade 11 Canadian students (Gardner, 1985), the adapted AMTB version used in this study consists of 96 positively and negatively worded items and does not include items about parental motivation as the recruited students are aged 18 and above. Therefore, in this study, the scales of the adapted AMTB version include interest in foreign languages, motivational intensity, English teaching assessment, English course evaluation, attitudes toward English learning and toward English native speakers, individual

purpose and desire to learn English, reasons to learn English, aptitude to learn a foreign/second language, and anxiety. The researcher translated the AMTB into Thai and asked an English language professor who is a native speaker of Thai to correct any mistakes both in grammar and coherence. Gardner's (1985) original 7-point Likert scale was adapted to a 5-point scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, and was coded as Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, and Strongly Agree = 5.

## 2.2 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

The third part of the questionnaire used in this study is the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0, a version for speakers of other languages learning English developed by Oxford (1990, p.293), as it is reported to be more comprehensive and detailed. The SILL has been used extensively to collect data on large number of learners and is also a standardized measure with versions for ESL and EFL students (Chamot, 2004, p.27).

The SILL was used to examine students' language learning strategies in all four skills: speaking, listening, writing, and reading. The SILL contains 50 items of learning strategy statements will be classified into six categories: Memory category (item 1-9), Cognitive strategy (items 10-23), Compensation strategy (items 24-29), Metacognitive strategy (items 30-38), Affective strategy (items 39-44), and Social strategy (items 45-50).

A 5-point Likert scale for the SILL was used to investigate student's language learning strategies. The SILL consists of 50 items and each item is given a degree of learning strategies, using a numerical value from 0 to 4 as follows:

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost true of me

Students answered each item using a 5-point Likert-scale that ranges from 1 to 5.

The SILL was translated into Thai to avoid misinterpretation. In other words, it was translated into Thai so that respondents interpreted or understood the content of the questionnaire in the same way. An expert was asked to check the accuracy of the translation. The questionnaire was improved according to her comments.

## 3. Data Collection

Data were collected at International College, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in the second semester of academic year 2014. The data collection procedures were follows:

3.1 The researcher explained the purposes and procedures of the study to English classroom instructors utilizing a letter to ask for permission and cooperation for data collection.

The instructors were asked to check their comprehension of the instructions in each part of the questionnaire in order to be able to clarify them for the participants, if necessary, as they completed the questionnaire.

3.2 The participants obtained and signed the informed consent form, translated into Thai, prior to participating in this study.

3.3 Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the 300 participants. The researcher explained the purposes and procedures of the study. In addition, the researcher informed that findings would be kept confidential and used for this research only. The students were also informed that their answers would be useful and beneficial to Thai students who desire to learn English more effectively; therefore, honest responses would be appreciated. The students were allowed to complete their questionnaires individually within 60 minutes.

#### 4. Data Analysis

To examine whether there is a difference in undergraduate students' use of six direct and indirect English learning strategies in each degree of motivation, the returned questionnaires were divided into three degrees of motivation—high, medium, and low—following to the result of the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB; Gardner, 1985) from participants. The data from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) were analyzed based on the six direct and indirect learning strategy types classified by Oxford (1990).

Arithmetic mean in English learning motivation intensity was divided into three levels as follows:

High	Strongly agree	4.50 to 5.00
	Agree	3.50 to 4.49
Medium	Neutral	2.50 to 3.49
	Disagree	1.50 to 2.49
Low	Strongly disagree	1.00 to 1.49

However, according to the interpreted means of motivation degree from the AMTB, the participants had high and medium degree of motivation. None of them had low degree of motivation. Therefore, the returned questionnaires of each group of the students were classified into two motivation groups: high and medium. Then the data were analyzed by using SPSS program to calculate descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations, and frequencies. The data were analyzed using a t-test for significant differences to compare the data within each group and across groups at the significance level 0.05. If the results have a significance level less than 0.05, this means that the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) is accepted.

## Results

**Table 1** The Difference in Students' Use of Six Direct and Indirect English Language Learning Strategies in Each Degree of Motivation

English Language Learning Strategies	Medium Level		High Level		t	Sig.
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.		
Direct Strategies	3.13	.58	3.32	.52	-4.486	.000*
1. Memory Strategies	3.05	.68	3.21	.63	-3.252	.001*
2. Cognitive Strategies	3.17	.60	3.41	.58	-5.330	.000*
3. Compensation Strategies	3.18	.66	3.33	.63	-3.189	.001*
Indirect Strategies	3.27	.63	3.57	.54	-7.096	.000*
4. Metacognitive Strategies	3.41	.72	3.85	.66	-8.766	.000*
5. Affective Strategies	3.19	.68	3.37	.62	-3.638	.000*
6. Social Strategies	3.22	.69	3.51	.68	-5.636	.000*
Total	3.20	.57	3.45	.49	-6.257	.000*

\* The mean difference is significant at the .01 level.

The overall motivation in English language learning of the participants was at the high degree of motivation (Mean  $\bar{X}$  = 3.81 and S. D. = .44). None of individual motivation scored at the low level. The most frequent response of individual motivation was Learning English is really great. (Mean  $\bar{X}$  = 4.57 and S. D. = .88), which displayed a high degree of motivation. The least frequent response of individual motivation was I really work hard to learn English. (Mean  $\bar{X}$  = 2.57 and S. D. = 1.12), which displayed a medium degree of motivation.

According to the Difference in Students' Use of Six Direct and Indirect English Language Learning Strategies in Each Degree of Motivation shown in Table 1, there was a significant difference (0.000\*) of overall English language learning strategy use of undergraduate students with medium and high degree of motivation in learning English language. Students with high degree of motivation (3.45) more frequent used overall English language learning strategies than did the students with the medium degree (3.20).

Students with high degree of motivation most frequently used Metacognitive strategies (3.85) while those with medium degree of motivation most frequently used Social Strategies (3.22). Both students with high and medium degree of motivation used Memory strategies the least (3.05 and 3.21).

In addition, it is important to note that there was a significant difference (0.000\*) in each category of strategy use of students who had medium and high degrees of motivation.

Students with high degree of motivation used English language learning strategies in each category more frequently than the ones with medium degree of motivation. Besides, there was a significant difference (0.000\*) of direct and indirect strategy use between students who had high and medium degree of motivation. The means of direct and indirect strategy use of students who had high degree of motivation (3.32 and 3.57) were more than the means of the ones who had medium degree of motivation (3.13 and 3.27).

### Conclusion

According to the data, there were significant differences at the 0.01 level between the means of the two degrees of motivation of students regarding their use of English language learning strategies. There is a difference in undergraduate students' use of six direct and indirect English learning strategies in each degree of motivation. In conclusion, undergraduate students who had different degrees of motivation, medium and high, used English language learning strategies differently.

### Discussion

The findings of this study supported the results claimed that different degrees of motivation influence learners' use of language learning strategies. Theory has shown that strategy use and motivation favors effectiveness in language learning (Cohen, 2003; Oxford, 1990). That is, the more aware learners are about the strategies and motivation they employ, the more effective and skillful learners they will be. According to many studies, the common factor that affects students' English language proficiency includes use of language learning strategy and degree of motivation. Educators, including teachers and students, should consider which learning strategies and types of motivation can facilitate or capitalize their learning and which may hinder their learning. This encourages educators to urgently improve the English proficiency of Thai students.

This study can be utilized by the teachers, and they can guide students to the right direction by equipping them with some working tools particularly language learning strategies. Students with high degree of motivation most frequently used Metacognitive strategies (3.85) while those with medium degree of motivation most frequently used Social Strategies (3.22). These results are consistent with the results of Tirabulkul (2005), Pawapatcharandom (2007) and Lamatya (2010) that Metacognitive category was the highest strategy use while Memory and Compensation strategy was employed least frequently. Also, it was found that highly proficient students employed Metacognitive strategies most frequently. Hence, teachers are suggested to focus more on instructing these types of strategies that have great influence on students' motivation.



### Suggestions

The following are some recommendations based on research results:

#### 1. Suggestions for Implementation

1.1 The findings of this study provide important information and practical guidelines for teachers to consider categories of language learning strategies appropriate for each group of students with different motivation degrees, particularly in Thai context.

1.2 Teachers should recognize the different English learning strategy preferences of students in order to provide a range of learning options and activities in class, which may encourage students to have more motivation in learning English.

#### 2. Suggestions for future research

2.1 In this study, the researcher employed the adapted Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) as the instruments to obtain data by using survey technique. However, other effective research methods such as interviews, classroom observations and diary analyses should be adopted to investigate the language learning strategies and language learning motivation in the future research.

2.2 In this current research, the researcher examined only in the factor of motivation in language learning, however, there are other factors such as learner's attitude, language proficiency, anxiety and belief relating to their use of language learning strategies. Therefore, the future researcher should focus more on those affective factors.

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