

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD OF THE STUDY

This chapter explains the methods and the procedures used in this study. The methodology to carry out this study is divided into five parts. The first part provides information about the participants. The second part presents details explanation on the instruments. The third part describes data collection procedures and finally, a method of data analysis for the study is described.

Participants

All students enrolled as fourth year English majors for the academic year 2004 at a university in the north of Thailand participated in this study. The population was 50. The female students comprised 56% of the participants and, male students comprised 44% of the sample. Their ages ranged from 21 to 26 years old, that is, 28% were 21 years old, 36% were 22 years old, 16% were 23 years old, 10% were 24 years old, 8% were 25 years old, and 2% were 26 years old (see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Subjects

Characteristic		Number	Percent
Gender	Male	22	44
	Female	28	56
Age	21 years	14	28%
	22 years	18	36%
	23 years	8	16%
	24 years	5	10%
	25 years	4	8%
	26 years	1	2%
Studied other	Yes	32	64%
Language	No	18	36%
Proficiency in English, compared with other students in class			
	Good	38	76%
	Fair	12	24%
Proficiency in English, compared with native speakers			
	Good	30	60%
	Fair	20	40%
Important of being proficient in English			
	Very important	43	86%
	Important	7	14%

Among all the participants, 64% reported that they have studied other languages such as Japanese, Chinese, and French other than English. Seventy-six percent of the participants rated their proficiency in English, when compared to other EFL students as good, and the other 24% rated themselves as fair. However, 60% of the participants rated their proficiency in English, when compared with native speakers as fair, and the other 40% rated themselves as poor. Eighty-six percent of the participants reported that it was very important for them to become proficient in English, and the other 14% claimed that it was important for them.

The whole population of the participant reported that they enjoyed learning English. Nevertheless, these students were chosen on the basis that they shared the same first language, which was Thai. These students had been studying English as a compulsory subject for 12 years and continued studying it as their major subject for more than three years. Their steadfastness in studying English and their learning process to reach this state where they were able to communicate in English was another factor for being chosen as participants.

Instruments

Frequently used techniques for assessing students' learning strategies include informal or formal interviews, group discussions, language learning diaries, dialogue journals between student and teacher, open-ended surveys, structured three-or five-point surveys of strategy frequency, and think-aloud procedures that require students to describe their strategies aloud while using them and questionnaires.

Observational methods are often difficult to employ because many learning strategies are internal and thus invisible to observers. Therefore, most learning strategy studies depend on learners' willingness and ability to describe their internal behaviors, both cognitive and effective (emotional) (Brown, 1989; Harlow, 1988).

By conducting studies with clear instructions in non-threatening circumstances, researchers have found that many or most L2 learners are capable of remembering their learning strategies and describing them when asked (Cohen, 1998; O'Malley, & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1990). Among these instruments, questionnaires and interview are believed to have been the most efficient and comprehensive ways to assess frequency of language learning strategy use. Therefore, the two

instruments were selected to collect data in the current study.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire, the *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)*, version 7.0 (Oxford, 1990), was used as an instrument for data collection (see Appendix A). The *SILL*, a self-reporting questionnaire, was designed for students of English as a second or foreign language. It requires participants to answer 50-item questions regarding their language-strategy use on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "never or almost never true" to "always or almost always true." On the *SILL*, students are asked to indicate their response (1,2,3,4, or 5) to a strategy description statements such as "I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English", or "I try not to translate word-for-word."

Oxford (1990) developed *SILL* for accessing the six language learning strategies. The *SILL* questionnaire measures the frequency with which a student uses the six language learning strategies. The first one is *memory strategies* (9 items), such as grouping or using imagery which help students store and retrieve new information.

The second is *cognitive strategies* (14 items), such as summarizing or reasoning deductively which enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means. The third is *compensation strategies* (6 items), like guessing or using synonyms which allow learners to use the language despite their often large gaps in knowledge. The fourth is *metacognitive strategies* (9 items), which allow learners to control their own cognition such as centering, arranging, attitudes. The fifth is *affective strategies* (6 items), which help to regulate emotions, motivations, and attitudes. The sixth group is *social strategies* (6 items), which help students learn through interaction with others (see Table 2)

Table 2

SILL Strategy Categories

Part	Strategies	Definitions of meanings	Numbers of items
A	Memory Strategies	Remembering more effectively	9
B	Cognitive Strategies	Using mental processes	14
C	Compensation Strategies	Compensation for missing knowledge	6
D	Metacognitive Strategies	Organizing and evaluating learning	9
E	Affective Strategies	Managing emotions	6
F	Social Strategies	Learning with others	6

The *SILL* was chosen for this study because it is comprehensive and widely used (Bremner, 1999; Glenn, 2000; Kyungok 2003; Shmais, 2003) and because this questionnaire is one of the most common instruments used by researchers to investigate language learning strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). The reliability and validity of *SILL* questionnaire are high. According to Oxford 1996, the internal consistency reliability of the *SILL* is .94 based on a 505-person sample (Yang,

1992), and .92 based on a 315-person sample (Watanabe, 1990). Content validity is .99 based on independent raters (Oxford, 1986; Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995).

Interview

As a follow-up to the questionnaire, 10 students, 5 male, and 5 female, were interviewed individually in order to gain important insights on various personal factors that have been shown to have an influence on their learning strategy selection retrieved from their SILL questionnaires. Then, four participants, two male and two female, were randomly selected from the first class for the follow-up interview. In the second class three participants were randomly selected for the follow-up interview, but this time two males and one female were selected. Finally in the third class, three participants, one male and two female were also randomly selected. The participants for the follow-up interview were randomly selected because the best way to increase the chances of achieving an unbiased sample is to make sure that the sample is randomly drawn (Crawl, 1996).

The interview was a semi-structure interview. It was conducted by using questioning on topics that are relevant to the research questions which were to study

what strategies that are most frequently used by EFL college students and the factors affecting their learning strategy choice. Interview consists of several grand tour questions in which all the students were asked (see Appendix B). The other questions were asked according to the answers given by each student in responding to the grand tour questions.

In the grand tour questions, twelve questions were asked to the 10 randomly chosen participants. The first six questions were concerning factors affecting their learning strategy choice and the following six questions were concerning the six learning strategies. The six grand tour questions includes question concerning their past formal and informal language learning experiences, the circumstances under which they learnt English, their beliefs concerning language learning including their views on language learning, and their preferred ways of leaning the language.

Moreover, the 10 chosen participants were also asked to describe the best way to learn languages in their view. Further to this their reason for learning English, their interest in the cultures of English spoken people and their preferred task type were also asked as all of these questions may influence strategy selection. In addition to this, questions concerning the six language

learning strategies; metaconitive strategies, cognitive strategies, social strategies, memory strategies, and affective strategies were also asked as a follow-up interview.

Data Collection Procedures

The process of data collection was carried out in the following order, selecting the participants, choosing the materials, designing the semi-structure interview question, collecting data, and analyzing the data respectively.

The researcher contacted the head of the English Department and requested permission to conduct the study. After receiving the permission, all three class teachers of fourth year classes were contacted and made appointment. The class teachers were asked for the permission to use 30 minutes of their class time for the students to fill out the questionnaire.

On the appointed days, the teachers explained to their classes that they would be asked to fill out the questionnaire. The researcher, then, explained the purpose of the current study and how to answer the questionnaire. The participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and the study would not

affect their course grades and their participation would help them get to know more about themselves as learners and enable them to consider how their learning might be made more effective. In addition, their participants would be kept in complete confidential.

After that, the background questions and the SILL questionnaire were distributed to all participants. Approximately 20 minutes was given to complete them. Questionnaire was given to the whole population. However, follow-up interview was conducted to 10 randomly selected participants because the best way to increase the chances of achieving an unbiased sample is to make sure that the sample is randomly drawn (Crowl, 1996). The researcher requested the randomly selected participants the permissions for a follow-up interview when the participants submitted their questionnaire. The appointments were made for the following day for each follow-up interview.

On the appointment days, the participants were interviewed individually. Each interview began by the explanation of the follow-up interview to be conducted by the researcher not clear. The researcher explained that the purpose of the interview was to learn about the factors affecting their selection of learning strategy and it was also the follow-up interview of the results

retrieved from the questionnaire. The researcher confirmed again that the interview would not affect their course grades and their participation would help them get to know more about themselves as learners and enable them to consider how their learning might be made more effective. Each interview lasted for about 15 minutes and was tape-recorded with the permission of the participants.

Data Analysis

After all the questionnaires were collected, the data were analyzed by using SPSS program. First, each participant's personal information was entered into the computer. Then the scales of each participant's response for each questions was keyed into the computer. Table 3 shows the meaning of the scales. Scale 1 is never or almost never true of me. Scale 2 is usually not true of me. Scale 3 is somewhat true of me. Scale 4 is usually true of me. The last scale, scale 5 is always or almost always true of me.

Table 3

Scales of Participants' Responses

Scale	Interpretation of scale
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 always true of me.

After all the data were entered into the computer, the participant' demographic data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, and mean. Next the results of each individual participant responses of *SILL* questionnaire were recorded and the mean scores of the participants' response to each question were calculated. After that, the total and average scores of the responses of the participants for each of the six categories of learning strategies from *SILL* instrument were calculated to identify any significant variation in the means of the frequency of use of the six categories. The means scores were interpreted according to the instruction of *SILL* questionnaire by Oxford 1998 (See Table 4). Finally, the interview data was analyzed. First, the interviews were transcribed. Then the participant's response for each item from the interview transcript was coded. The coding

was done by dividing each participant's response by the codes adapted from the six language learning strategies categories and factors affecting learning strategies selections.

Table 4

Interpretation of Mean Scores

Degree of strategies used	Interpretation of scale	Range of Mean score
High	Always or almost always used.	4.5 to 5.0
	Usually used.	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	Sometimes used.	2.5 to 3.4
	Generally not used.	1.5 to 2.4
Low	Never or almost never used.	1.0 to 1.4

The results of the analysis will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.