LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES:
A SURVEY OF FORM 4 STUDENTS AND ENGLISH TEACHERS IN KUCHING RURAL AND URBAN SCHOOLS

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The project entitled 'Language Learning Strategies: A survey of Form 4 students and English teachers in kuching rural and urban schools' was prepared by Koh Sien Ing and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Education with Honours (Teaching English as a Second Language).

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ABSTRACT

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES: A SURVEY OF FORM 4 STUDENTS
AND ENGLISH TEACHERS IN KUCHING RURAL AND URBAN SCHOOLS

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Language learning strategies can be referred to as conscious steps or behaviors used by language learners to enhance the acquisition, storage, retention, recall, and use of new information. Prior research seemed to indicate that there are discrepancies between students' and teacher's perceptions on language learning strategies. Hence, the study aimed to examine whether there was a match or mismatch between English language learning strategies used by From 4 students and their English teachers in Kuching urban and rural schools. This study used cross-sectional survey design and employed questionnaires to collect data. Instruments for data collection were students and teachers questionnaires adapted from SILL (Oxford, 1990) to enable the comparison between students and teacher's strategies used. Cluster sampling technique was used to choose 399 Form 4 students and 12 Form 4 teachers from two urban and two rural schools in Kuching. This study reported both students and teachers preferred to use metacognitive and social strategies in the teaching and learning English. Independent samples t-test results indicated no significant differences between rural and urban participants' use of language learning strategies. Males and females were found to differ significantly in strategy use with females used strategies at a higher frequency than males. One-way Anova results reported no significant difference between different races' use of total language learning strategies. Proficient and less proficient students also found to be differing significantly in the use of language learning strategy with proficient students used more strategies. Finally, independent samples t-test results confirmed a mismatch between teachers and students' strategy used. Recommendations for further research were provided. Implications of the findings were discussed suggesting more teachers and student's cooperation in the classroom and conducting strategy training based on learner's characteristics.

ABSTRAK

STRATEGI-STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA: SATU KAJIAN ANTARA
PELAJAR FORM 4 DAN GURU-GURU BAHASA INGGERIS DI SEKOLAH
LUAR BANDAR DAN SEKOLAH BANDAR KUCHING

Koh Sien Ing

Strategi-strategi pembelajaran bahasa boleh dirujuk sebagai langkah-langkah yang disedari oleh pelajar atau kelakuan pelajar-pelajar bahasa untuk mengukuhkan pengambilalihan, penyimpanan, pengekalan, pengingat, dan penggunaan maklumat baru. Kajian-kajian yang dijalankan menunjukkan terdapat percanggahan antara persepsi pelajar-pelajar dan guru mengenai strategi-strategi pembelajaran bahasa. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk memeriksa sama ada wujudnya percanggahan antara strategi-strategi pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris yang diguna oleh para pelajar From 4 dan guru-guru Inggeris mereka di antara sekolah-sekolah bandar dan luar bandar Kuching. Kajian ini menggunakan 'cross-sectional design' dan soal selidik bagi mengumpul data. Alat-alat untuk pengumpulan maklumat adalah soal selidik pelajar dan soal selidik guru yang diubahsuaikan daripada SILL (Oxford, 1990) bagi membolehkan perbandingan antara strategi-strategi yang digunakan oleh guru dan para pelajar. Teknik 'Cluster sampling' digunakan sebagai teknik persampelan untuk memilih 399 pelajar Form 4 dan 12 guru Form 4 daripada dua buah sekolah bandar dan dua buah sekolah luar bandar di Kuching. Kajian ini melaporkan pelajar-pelajar dan guru-guru menggemari metakognitif dan social strategi dalam proses pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris. Keputusan Ujian t menunjukkan perbezaan yang tidak signifikan antara subjek-subjek dari sekolah luar bandar dan bandar dalam penggunaan strategi-strategi pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris. Lelaki dan perempuan didapati berbeza dengan signifikan dalam penggunaan strategi di mana perempuan menggunakan strategi-strategi dengan frekuensi yang lebih tinggi daripada lelaki. Keputusan Anova melaporkan perbezaan yang tidak signifikan antara pelbagai bangsa dalam penggunaan strategi-strategi. Pelajar-pelajar yang cekap dan kurang cekap juga didapati berbeza nyata sekali dalam strategi pembelajaran penggunaan bahasa dengan pelajar-pelajar cekap menggunakan lebih banyak strategi-strategi. Akhirnya, keputusan Ujian-t mengesahkan terdapat percanggahan antara strategi yang digunakan oleh guru-guru dan pelajar-pelajar. Cadangan bagi penyelidikan lanjutan telah disediakan. Implikasi juga dibincangkan dan mencadangkan kerjasama antara guru-guru dan pelajar dalam proses pembelajaran dan menjalankan latihan strategi berdasarkan ciri-ciri pelajar.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL   English as a Second Language

EFL   English as a Foreign Language

SILL   Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.0   Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the introduction to the study. It consists of eight subsections, which includes the descriptions of the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, operational definition of terms, scope of the study and chapter review.

1.1   Background of the Study

Over the years, researchers and teachers have shown a great interest in determining what differs successful from less successful language learners and how to improve the learning of English in the context of a second language. This has led to the identification of the characteristics of successful language learners (Rubin, 1975), especially their use of modifiable second language variables with the hope that such information can be used to improve learning efficiency of less successful learners. One of these variables is the use of language learning strategies. According to Oxford (1990), some learner variables like general learning styles and personality traits, are very difficult to change. However, learning strategies are easier to modify

and it is teachable through strategy training, which is an essential part of language education.

The interest in learner processes in second language learning is the result of a significant shift of focus in education from the emphasis on methods of teaching to learner characteristics and their effects on learning (Lessard-Clouston, 1997). The change resulted in less emphasis on teachers and teaching and greater emphasis on learners and learning. According to Wenden and Rubin (1987), there "was a growing interest in defining how learners can take charge of their own learning and clarifying how teachers can help students become more autonomous" (p.15). Moreover, language learning strategies are believed to play an important role in learning a second language, as they may assist learners in mastering the forms and functions that are required for reception and production in the second language and affect second language achievement (Bialystok, 1981).

Thus, research related to language learning strategies has prospered since the 1980s as the importance of language learning strategies in language learning has been proven and emphasized worldwide (Green & Oxford, 1995; O'Malley et al., 1985; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975; Su, 2005). Generally, strategies can be referred to as conscious steps or behaviors used by language learners to enhance the acquisition, storage, retention, recall, and use of new information (Oxford, 1990). In other words, strategies are essential for developing communicative competence as they are tools for active, self-directed involvement in language learning. Appropriate language learning strategies used will result in improved language proficiency and students' self- confidence. Besides, many researches suggested that the conscious use of language learning strategies is one of the characteristics of good language learners (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 1990; O Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Moreover, Nunan (1989) stated that, as the principal reason for having language classroom is to facilitate language learning, it is obvious that learner behaviour should be paying due attention. For learning to take place, it usually involves the collaboration of both teacher and learner. The teacher cannot do it all alone and most learners will find the difficulties of learning alone (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). So, in making decisions regarding the type of activities to conduct in a language classroom, teacher should take into account of learner differences and as well as the match of types of language learning strategies with the given task.

In short, for effective language learning and teaching, both learner skills and learner preferences should be given due attention. In promoting this idea, students should be provided with the opportunity to raise their consciousness of the strategies used in learning English. On the other hand, their English teachers need to be aware of the potential of language learning strategies in helping their students to learn English and their student's current language learning strategies used in order to take a step further of helping them. As been claimed by Nunan (1989), learner behaviours need to be studied in relation to teacher behaviours and vice versa in order to understand language classroom. Moreover, Kumaravadivelu (1991) says that the more teachers know about the learner's personal approaches and personal concepts, the better and more productive the teaching and will be (as cited in Barkhuizen, 1998). Therefore, teachers who are more aware of how their learners approach language learning will be more able to facilitate desired learning outcomes in the classroom.

Moved with the conviction that language learning strategies as well as learner's and teacher's variables are of crucial importance in the teaching and learning of English language, this study is designed to investigate the language learning strategies used by Kuching rural and urban Form 4 students in learning English and their English teacher's employment of these language learning strategies in English lesson.

1.2   Research Problem

The aims for English language syllabus in Malaysia are to extend learners'
English language proficiency in order to meet their needs for English in everyday life,
for knowledge acquisition and for future workplace. Therefore, one of the objectives
for English teaching in Malaysia is to develop students' communicative competence.
Communicative competence refers to the ability to communicate through realistic
interaction among learners by using meaningful, contextualized language (Oxford,
1990).

Although research into language learning strategies has received considerable
attention in recent year, however, Mohamed Amin Embi, Juriah Long and Mohd Isa
Hamzah (2001) found that there are only a few studies on the types of language
learning strategies done in Malaysian secondary school setting. In the English as a
second language area particularly, majority of the language learning strategies
researches have been taken in the target language setting such as learning English in
United States, Australia and so on. Therefore, Mohamed Amin Embi, Juriah Long
and Mohd Isa Hamzah (2001) urged for more studies designed to identify the types of
language learning strategies used by Malaysian secondary school students in learning
English. In fact, this is important if researchers are to appropriate gauge the relative
influence and importance of language learning strategies in learners' language
learning process in the context of Malaysian classroom setting. This is further
supported by Wharton (2000) that suggested a need for more studies on different
learners in different settings as the use of different types and frequency of language
learning strategies depend on the setting in which the learning occur.

Malaysian English teachers, just like all other educators, have to bear in mind
that students differ consistently from each other in strategies they use for learning
English. Many ESL teachers experience student resistance when they introduce an

instructional activity in the classroom. Some students want more opportunities to participate in free conversation, expressing their wish towards a more communicatively oriented approach. Other students may prefer more emphasis on individual work and grammar teaching (Bada & Okan, 2000). The different ways of how a learner acquires, retains and retrieves information are collectively termed as learning styles or learning preferences (Stapa, 2003). Applying the concept to current study, students' language learning strategies preferences refer to the language learning strategies that students use in learning English language. For instance, if students used metacognitive strategies more often than memory strategies, it implies that students preferred metacognitve strategies over memory strategies.

It is important to note that while students bring with them their own learning preferences, teachers also bring with them their own teaching strategies (Stapa, 2003). Some teachers lecture, others demonstrate or discuss, some focus on rules and others on examples, some emphasize memory and others understanding. Although many teachers acknowledge the need to understand the ways in which learners differ in terms of needs and preferences, they may not consult learners in conducting language activities. Barkhuizen (1998) study revealed that, teachers were frequently surprised to learn about the thoughts and feelings of their students. Some teachers were obviously not aware of the students' and their own focus on these skills in their classes and would hardly have predicted that their students see the acquiring of these skills as the most effective means of learning English. On the other hand, Chamot's (1990) interviews with teachers also discovered that some teachers had never reflected on how their students were learning English (as cited in O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). After the idea of student language strategies was presented, however, teachers expressed great interest in discovering those strategies and capitalizing upon those strategies in their teaching approach.

Bada and Okan (2000) further provided insights on the basis for teacher's reluctance to cooperate because teachers generally regard learners as not capable of expressing what they want or need to learn and how they want to learn it. Besides, it is argued that in some classrooms, the roles of teachers and learners are so rigidly drawn that expecting learners to participate in decision-making in the classroom may not be viewed as appropriate. However, as the educational paradigm in Malaysia has now shift to learner centred, teacher's roles are no longer as a core supplier of knowledge or authoritative figure but taken the function as facilitator, helper, guide etc. This role changes require teachers to have new teaching capacities include identifying learners' learning strategies, conducting training on learning strategies and help students become more independent (Oxford, 1990). Only when students take more responsibility, more learning occurs and both teachers and learners feel more successful.

Therefore, sometimes it is a doubt on either English teacher in Malaysian secondary classrooms has been able to cater different language learning styles of the students. Or it just happens as been revealed by other researches that most teachers are not aware of the strategies used by students to learn the language. A research conducted by Zhenhui (2001) in relation to the significance of matching teaching and learning styles in East Asian countries stated that if teachers are only assuming on what and how their students prefer to learn based on teacher's own perceptions and intuition, this will contribute to the risk of mismatch between teaching and learning styles as many research results have indicated that mismatch is detrimental to learning and teaching process (Zhenhui, 2001). Moreover, Oxford (1990) stated that teacher expectations, as been expressed through classroom instructional and testing, methods, strongly shape learners' strategies. Therefore, teacher's variable has been included in this study.

In summary, the purpose of this study was to examine whether there is a match between English language learning strategies used by From 4 students and that of their English teachers in Kuching rural and urban schools. More specifically, it investigated the language learning strategies employed by Form 4 students in Kuching rural and urban schools for learning English in and the language learning strategies that their English teachers incorporated into their teaching to help their students in learning English. In addition, the study aimed to identify the use of language leaning strategies by students of different genders, races and proficiency levels. Finally, it also investigated whether there is a match or mismatch between language learning strategies that English teacher incorporate into the teaching of English with their students' language learning strategies preferences.

1.3   Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were listed below:

1.   To identify the language learning strategies employed by the Form 4 students in Kuching urban and rural schools in learning English.
2.   To identify the language learning strategies employed by students of different genders, races and proficiency levels in learning English.
3.   To identify the language learning strategies that English teachers incorporated into the teaching of English.
4.   To find out whether there is a match or mismatch between language learning strategies that English teachers incorporate into the English lesson and their students' language learning strategy use.

1.4 Research Questions

This study aimed to answer following questions:

1. What were the frequency and types of language learning strategies used by Form 4 urban and rural school's students to learn English?
2. Did the overall language learning strategy use and the use of six types of language learning strategies (including memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, affective and social strategies) vary between urban and rural students?
3. What were the students' use of English language learning strategies based on gender?
4. What were the students' use of English language learning strategies based on race?
5. What were the students' use of English language learning strategies based on proficiency level?
6. What were the types and frequency of language learning strategies that Form 4 urban and rural school's teachers incorporate into the teaching of English language?
7. Was there a significant difference between rural and urban teachers' use of language learning strategies?
8. Were the language learning strategies that English teachers incorporated into the English lesson match with their students' language learning strategies preferences?

1.5   Significance of the Study

This study was conducted on the basic of previous research results that identified the importance of language learning strategies as one of the key dimensions for successful language learning (Oxford, 1990; Su, 2005). In addition, it was also conducted based on the assumption that mismatch in the classroom teaching and learning activities can affect students' learning (Zhenhui, 2001) as well as influence students' use of language learning strategies (Liyanage, 2004; Oxford, 1990).

It is worthwhile investigating the Malaysian secondary student's English language learning strategies and the extent to which teachers' use of different types of strategies intersect with their students' actual language learning strategies used. This is because the language learning strategies that a teacher presented in the class are greatly influenced by what strategies they think are important for their students to learn English (Oxford, 1990). For example, if a teacher believes that social interaction is important for the students in learning English, it is most probably that the teacher will encourage students to develop social learning strategies such as practice English with other students. However, if language learning strategies taught by the teachers mismatch with their students' learning strategies preferences, the learning process might be affected.

In addition, both teachers and learners should understand language learning strategies and they need to confront the importance of language learning strategies in learning English (Su, 2005). This study is significant as the result will provide insight for secondary English teachers to identify strategies patterns among various groups of students in their classes, which they should consider when designing learning tasks. This study can also draw teachers' awareness towards their students' regular language learning strategies used and the realization of some of teachers'

misperception that they understand every student's preferences. On the other hand, results of this study can also draw students' awareness to the types of strategies that their teacher thinks as important to improve their English.

Besides, it is important for teachers to discover the kind of language learning strategies that are already used by students, including the types and frequency in order to better suit students' language learning needs and ability and eventually achieve the best teaching and learning result (Chamot, 2004; Su, 2005). This study enables teachers to identify their students' current learning strategies and take a further step of teaching students about language learning strategies that help students to learn English more successfully. By doing so, this enables English teachers to offer the most appropriate courses to suit the students' needs and levels.

Finally, strategies taught by English teachers can also be compared with previous research findings especially in terms of types of strategies that researches have shown as the characteristics of good language learners. With this, perhaps it enables us to infer the degree of teacher's awareness in the issues of language learning strategies.

In short, this study is with the hope that such information can draw English teachers' attention to the types of strategies their students actually used to learn English and help teachers, in general, and Malaysian ESL teachers, to teach in a way that is appealing to most of the students and cater different needs.

1.6   Operational Definition of Terms

The following are the definitions of the specific terms used in this study.

1.6.1 Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies refer to the specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques employed by students, often intentionally to improve their progress of acquiring, storing, retrieving and using the second language (Oxford, 1990).

In relation to this study, language learning strategies refer to any actions, behaviours, steps or techniques taken by students and teachers in the process of teaching and learning English language. These language learning strategies include metacognitive, affective and social strategies that affect learning indirectly and cognitive, compensation, and memory strategies that affect students' learning of English directly.

1.6. 2 Categorization of Language Learning Strategies

Oxford (1990) divides language learning styles into two major classes: direct and indirect. These two subclasses are subdivided into a total of six groups namely, memory, cognitive and compensation strategies under the direct class and metacognitive, affective and social strategies under the indirect classes.

I.   Direct strategies:
Direct strategies consist of strategies that are directly involving the target language.

- *Memory strategies:* consist of strategies that help learners to store and retrieve new information.
- *Cognitive strategies:* strategies that enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means.

- *Compensation strategies:* strategies that used by learners to overcome deficiencies of knowledge in language.

II.   Indirect strategies

Indirect strategies support and manage language learning without (in many instances) directly involving with the target language.

- *Metacognitive strategies:* strategies that allow learners to control their own learning process.

- *Affective strategies:* consist of strategies that help learners to regulate emotions, motivations and attitudes.

- *Social strategies:* strategies that help learners to learn through interaction with other people.

1.6.3 Proficiency

According to Ellis (1990), proficiency consisted of the learner's knowledge of the target language and it can be considered synonymous with 'competence'. Proficiency can be viewed as linguistic competence or communicative competence. Second language proficiency is usually measured in relation to native speaker proficiency.