



LLS use and Reading Proficiency: Assamese ESL Learner's Context

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Abstract

This paper studies the relationship of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) use and reading proficiency. Four hundred and fifty undergraduate Assamese ESL learners from three colleges of Dibrugarh University, Assam participated in the study. The aim of the paper is to investigate the relationship of Assamese ESL Learner's use of LLS and reading comprehension ability in English. A Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) based questionnaire is used to identify learner's use of LLS and a reading activity questionnaire is used to measure learner's reading proficiency. The participants answered the instruments at the beginning of the experiment, followed by LLS instruction for four weeks and a post-test on the same questionnaires. The Pearson's correlation analysis revealed significant positive correlation between the use of all the six types of LLS categories and learner's proficiency in answering all the three types of reading comprehension questions both in the pre and post-test context. The study recommends that LLS instruction should be integrated in the undergraduate ESL classrooms to increase learner's reading proficiency in English.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, LLS and Reading Proficiency, Assamese ESL Learners, ELT

Introduction

In Assam, English is learned as a second or associate language in the educational institutions from primary level of education. In the recent years, with the liberalisation of Indian economy in the last part of the 20th century, the English language requirement received additional momentum. Adequate proficiency in English became unavoidable requirement and part and parcel of today's education. Motivation for learning the language is quite favourable in the society. However, despite having a strong positive requirement for learning English, a large section of learners exhibit proficiency below expected level even at the undergraduate levels.

It has been a common observation that some students are more successful in learning a new language than others. Disparity in learning a language has been a subject of research. Modern researches in the field of language learning have been providing insights into how the learners of a language approach the learning of a language. It has been pointed out that learning a language is a complex cognitive process. It is a type of problem solving for which learners use different LLS. Language learning strategies are specific methods or techniques used by individual learners to facilitate the comprehension, retention, retrieval and application of information for language learning and acquisition (Oxford, 1990). In a nutshell, LLS are 'operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and

use of information...; specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations' (Oxford, 1990:8). Therefore, it implies that LLS are good indicators of how learners approach tasks or problems encountered during the process of language learning. An important area of investigation in the field of LLS research is to understand the relationship of LLS with proficiency. A considerable number of studies have investigated the relationship such as Lai (2009), Salahshour, Sharifi & Salahshour (2013) Hasan & Paramasivam (2016), Alfian (2018) etc.

Lai (2009) conducted a study in Taiwan. The study investigated language learning strategies used by 418 EFL learners and looked for relationships between learning strategy use and the patterns of strategy use based on language proficiency. The research discovered that proficiency level has a significant effect on strategy choice and use. In other words, more proficient learners used more learning strategies.

Salahshour, Sharifi & Salahshour (2013) conducted a study on Iranian high school learners to explore the relationship between choice of learning strategies and English proficiency. The results indicated that proficient learners use significantly more strategy.

Hasan & Paramasivam (2016) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between the use of language learning strategies and English proficiency of 124 Kurdish pre-university students. The researcher used Oxford's (1990) SILL, individual background questionnaire and a version of English Sunrise Test for the investigation. The results revealed that in addition to proficiency, learner's learning level also influence LLS use. More advanced level learners use greater number of strategies.

Alfian (2018) conducted a study at an Islamic university in Indonesia to explore the relation between language proficiency level and language learning strategy choice of EFL learners. A total of 284 Indonesian university students classified as high, medium, and low based on their proficiency

levels completed the SILL questionnaires. The study indicated that proficiency level and strategy use has a linear relationship; the higher the proficiency level, the higher the number of strategies employed.

Hypothesis and Research Questions

In the context of the above discussion, present study tries to investigate the relationship of Assamese ESL learner's reading proficiency with their use of LLS. Following hypothesis and research questions guided the present study.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between Assamese ESL learners' ability in answering three types of reading comprehension questions in English and the use of Language Learning Strategies (LLS).

Research Questions:

1. Is there any relationship between Assamese ESL learners' use of LLS and their ability in answering specific types of reading comprehension question before strategy instruction?
2. Is there any relationship between Assamese ESL learners' use of LLS and their ability in answering specific types of reading comprehension question after strategy instruction?

Methodology

A total of 450 undergraduate Assamese ESL learners from three colleges of Dibrugarh University, Assam, participated in the study. The age of the participants was 19 to 20 years at the time of the experiment. They had 10 to 12 years of English learning experience. The study used two instruments:

- a. A SILL (Oxford, 1990) based questionnaire to measure learner's use of LLS.
- b. A reading activity questionnaire to measure learner's proficiency in reading in English.

The SILL based questionnaire was developed from Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL, Version 7.0). Oxford's SILL was

intended for the students of English as a second or foreign language. It contained fifty multiple choice items, each representing one strategy. In the present study, some modifications were made to the SILL questionnaire. This was necessary because in the original version there were certain strategy items which were either unusual for the Assamese ESL learners of undergraduate level or specifically unrelated to reading and writing skill. Therefore, some strategy items were removed, modified or added for the purposes of the present study. The final version of the questionnaire contained 42 strategy items.

The reading activity questionnaire was an instrument designed to test the participants' reading and writing proficiency in English. The questionnaire contained a total of 20 multiple choice comprehension questions, 5 each from four passages, to test the reading comprehension ability of learners. Out of the 5 multiple choice comprehension questions, there were 2 main idea questions, 2 factual information questions and 1 inference question. There were four options for each multiple choice comprehension questions and the participants were required to read the passage and mark the correct option. Two passages were

selected from previous undergraduate level question papers of the Dibrugarh University and the rest two passages were based on the TOEFL (2005). In order to make the task challenging and to sustain learners' interest, the passages having difficulty level of slightly above the learners' usual proficiency level were selected.

Results and Findings

Results for the research question 1:

1. Is there any relationship between Assamese ESL learners' use of LLS and their ability in answering specific types of reading comprehension question before strategy instruction?

Table 1 shows that there is significant positive correlation ($p < .001$) of experimental group's score in all the three types of reading comprehension questions and all the LLS categories except memory strategies of SILL. Memory strategy has a significant ($p < .05$) negative correlation with the score of the inference question. Therefore, it can be concluded that except memory strategies the use of all the LLS categories have positive impact on the Assamese ESL learners' ability in answering all three types of reading comprehension questions before LLS instruction.

Table 1: Reading Comprehension Questions' Score and LLS Use in Pre-test

		Total Memory Strategies	Total Cognitive Strategies	Total Compensation Strategies	Total Metacognitive Strategies	Total Affective Strategies	Total Social Strategies
Main Idea	Pearson Correlation	.223**	-.022	.193**	.478**	.262**	.235**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.748	.004	.000	.000	.000
	N	225	225	225	225	225	225
Factual Information	Pearson Correlation	.229**	.114	.386**	.568**	.499**	.424**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.089	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	225	225	225	225	225	225
Inference	Pearson Correlation	-.154*	.483**	.463**	.340**	-.083	.258**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.000	.000	.000	.217	.000
	N	225	225	225	225	225	225

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

2. Is there any relationship between Assamese ESL learners' use of LLS and their ability in answering specific types of reading comprehension question after strategy instruction?

The results of the correlation analysis of Table 2 reveal that there is significant positive ($p < .01$) correlation between the experimental groups' score in three types of comprehension questions and the use of all the strategy categories.

Table 2: Reading Comprehension Questions’ Score and LLS Use in Post-test

	Total Memory Strategies	Total Cognitive Strategies	Total Compensation Strategies	Total Metacognitive Strategies	Total Affective Strategies	Total Social Strategies
Pearson Correlation	.638**	.656**	.626**	.284**	.463**	.308**
Main Idea Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	225	225	225	225	225	225
Pearson Correlation	.514**	.480**	.579**	.323**	.420**	.347**
Inference Questions Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	225	225	225	225	225	225
Pearson Correlation	.715**	.638**	.635**	.298**	.520**	.431**
Factual Information Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	225	225	225	225	225	225

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Therefore, the results of the correlation analysis of both before and after the LLS instruction provide enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. It can be further stated that there is a significant positive relationship between Assamese ESL learners’ ability in answering specific types of reading comprehension question and the use of all the categories of Language Learning Strategies (LLS).

Discussion

A SILL based questionnaire was used to measure learner’s use of LLS and a reading activity questionnaire was used to measure learner’s proficiency in answering three types of reading

comprehension questions in English. The findings indicated strong relationship of LLS and reading proficiency both in pre and post-test contexts. More proficient learner uses more LLS. In other words, higher use of LLS is associated with higher reading proficiency level of undergraduate Assamese ESL learners. The finding supports the finding of Lai (2009), Salahshour, Sharifi & Salahshour (2013), Hasan & Paramasivam (2016), Alfian (2018) etc.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted to investigate the relationship of LLS with reading proficiency of Assamese ESL learners. The findings revealed significantly strong relationship of LLS use with reading comprehension ability of learners. It can therefore be recommended that LLS instruction

should be incorporated in the ESL teaching learning situation in the undergraduate level in order to increase Assamese ESL learner's reading proficiency in English. Moreover, further studies of similar type should be conducted by inclusion of greater number subjects and variety of settings.

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