RELATIONSHIPS AMONG BELIEFS, LEARNING STRATEGIES, AND ACHIEVEMENT IN LEARNING ENGLISH OF THAI GRADUATE STUDENTS IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This research aims to understand the perceptions of 220 graduate students of their beliefs, strategies, and achievement in learning English. The data were collected through closed and open-ended questionnaires and analysed quantitatively. To further explore in-depth personal views, 35 students were selected for interviews. The study reveals that the students hold various beliefs and have similarities and differences in strategy use. More than half considered themselves low achievers whereas the slight percentage thought they were successful in English language learning. The students rating themselves as high achieving English learners show higher use of learning strategies than those viewing themselves as low achievers. Significant correlations between students' learning beliefs and strategies indicate that the beliefs to some extent relate to strategy use in both parallel and inverse ways. The findings can be valuable resources for considering appropriate ways in which the students' perceptions can be used to develop proper English teaching methods and to improve students' English learning performances.

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อทำความเข้าใจการรับรู้ของบัณฑิตที่สำเร็จการศึกษาจำนวน 220 คนที่มีต่อความเชื่อ กลยุทธ์และความสำเร็จในการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ การรวบรวมข้อมูลใช้แบบสอบถามคำถามปลายปิดและคำถามปลายเปิด และการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณ เพื่อสำรวจมุมมองส่วนบุคคลในเชิงลึกมีการคัดเลือกนักศึกษา 35 คนเพื่อสัมภาษณ์ ผลการศึกษาเปิดเผยว่านักศึกษามีความเชื่อที่ต่างกันและมีทั้งความเหมือนและความแตกต่างกันในการใช้กลยุทธ์ นักศึกษามากกว่า

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ครึ่งหนึ่งคิดว่าตนเองประสบความสำเร็จในระดับต่ำ ในขณะที่ส่วนน้อยคิดว่าประสบความสำเร็จในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ นักศึกษาที่ให้คะแนนความสำเร็จในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษสูงมีการใช้กลยุทธ์ในการเรียนรู้มากกว่านักศึกษาที่ให้คะแนนตนเองต่ำ ความสัมพันธ์อย่างมีนัยสำคัญระหว่างความเชื่อในการเรียนรู้และกลยุทธ์แสดงให้เห็นว่าความเชื่อมีความสัมพันธ์กับการใช้กลยุทธ์ทั้งวิธีขนานและวิธีตรงกันข้าม ผลการวิจัยสามารถใช้เป็นข้อมูลที่มีคุณค่าสำหรับการพิจารณาแนวทางในการใช้การรับรู้ของนักศึกษาเพื่อพัฒนาวิธีการสอนภาษาอังกฤษที่เหมาะสมและพัฒนาการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษา

INTRODUCTION

This study was initiated by a concern of the researcher about English learning success at a Thai public university. From the researcher's observation and interaction with graduate students in the study context, most of them seem to have inadequate English proficiency even though they have already passed two compulsory graduate English courses required to complete their degree programs. In fact, the question of "*How can we help the students learn English more effectively?*" has become the focus of attention of all the English language teachers, including the teacher researcher in this study. To some extent, the researcher believes that this topic could provide some useful pointers for the improvement of teaching practice in the field of ELT and other relevant areas. The research results would shed valuable light on developing the practice of English language teaching and learning in higher education in Thailand and would also be very beneficial to classroom management and student learning achievement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Learning Beliefs

Wenden (1986) and Hosenfeld (cited in Ellis, 1994: 477) label learners' beliefs as 'mini theories' of second language learning; however, Horwitz (1987) argues that language learners in reality hold some beliefs about language learning albeit they may not always be clear or deliberately thought about. This is in line with Richardson (1996, cited in Peacock, 2001) who regards learners' beliefs as *"psychologically understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true"*. Many researchers (e.g., Cotterall, 1999; Pintrich and De Groot, 1990) note that learners who consider beliefs important for English language learning show higher degrees of perseverance in their learning tasks. Thus, knowledge of learners' beliefs about language learning may provide language educators with a better understanding of their students' expectations of, commitment to, success in, and satisfaction with their English classes (Horwitz, 1988). As a result, teachers can make more informed choices about teaching (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005) and adopt a more responsive approach to the

organisation of learning opportunities (Cotterall, ibid.) in their lessons.

Horwitz (1985, 1987, 1988, 1999), one of pioneering researchers on language learning beliefs, develops the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) in order to assess students' and teachers' beliefs on a variety of issues and arguments related to language learning. The instrument has been extensively used to investigate the links between beliefs and proficiency (Mantle-Bromley, 1995), the impact of culture on beliefs (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996; McCarger, 1993; Horwitz, 1999), that of gender (Siebert, 2003; Tercanlioglu, 2005; Bernat and Lloyd, 2007), the dimensions underlying language learners' beliefs (Sakui and Gaies, 1999) and strategy use (Yang, 1999) in various contexts.

Language Learning Strategies

Weinstein and Mayer (1986) define learning strategies broadly as "*behaviours and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning*" which are "*intended to influence the learner's encoding process*" (p.315). Mayer (1988) more specifically defines learning strategies as "behaviours of a learner that are intended to influence how the learner processes information" (p.11). These early definitions from the educational literature reflect the roots of learning strategies in cognitive science, with its essential assumptions that human beings process information and that learning involves such information processing. Clearly, learning strategies are involved in all learning, regardless of the content and context.

Oxford (1989), with her famous Strat-

egies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), provides specific definition of language learning strategies that they are specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques which can facilitate the act of bringing something under internal control, storage, retrieval, or use the new language. Strategies are also tools for the self-directed involvement which are necessary for developing communicative ability. Afterward, Oxford (1990) develops the definition by pointing out that learning strategies are explicit actions taken by learners to make learning easier, more rapid, more pleasurable, more autonomous, more useful, and more convenient to new situations.

Learning strategies have been extensively researched in many other studies. Biggs (1993), for example, describes a learning strategy as how a student engages in a task and in this respect he defines it as actual behavior in a specific context. In the study of Vermunt (1998), the stability of learning strategies and the regular use of learning activities as a combination are mainly focused.

Language Learning Achievement

Language learning achievement or proficiency has been consistently linked to strategy use (Green and Oxford, 1995; Khaldieh, 2000; Wharton, 2000)-the general pattern being that increased success is linked to greater strategy use. However, there have also been results suggesting that the relationship is more complex than a simple linear connection between building up achievement and strategy use, and depends greatly on the type of strategy employed. Chen (1990), for example, con-

cludes that more achieving learners actually used fewer communication strategies, despite the fact that they use them more effectively than less achieving students. At the same time, because of the correlational nature of this type of research, causality cannot be claimed, and as such, it cannot be determined whether the language learning achievement comes before, after, or concurrently with strategy use.

Achievement or proficiency has been determined in a huge number of ways by various researchers. Green and Oxford (1995) provide examples of the approaches that achievement has been determined including: self-ratings (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989); language achievement tests (O'Mara and Lett, 1990; Phillips, 1991); entrance and placement examinations (Mullin, 1992); language course grades (Mullins, ibid.); years of language study (Watanabe, 1990); and career status, (Ehrman and Oxford, 1989).

In this research, language learning achievement is simply determined on the basis of the students' self ratings which are based on their personal judgement and the marks/grades given by their teachers. This is done for practical considerations that many students with high grade point average demonstrate rather poor English skills (Suwanarak and Phothongsunan, 2008) and grades can merely reflect learners' performance rather than their true competence (Honigman, 1997). This present study, therefore, does not primarily focus on reliability and validity of the students' self-ratings on their learning achievement which is typically supported by consistency of the scores produced by a measurement tool and agreements with teachers' judgement or

peer rankings (Ross, 2006).

Relationships Among Language Learning Beliefs, Strategies, and Achievement

Ellis (1994) sees that individual learner's differences (i.e. beliefs, affective states, learner factors, and prior learning experience) and situational and social factors (i.e. target language, setting, task performed, and gender) are equally important in determining learners' choice of learning strategies (i.e. the quantity and type of strategies). In turn, learning strategies influence two aspects of learning outcomes, which are the rate of learning and the ultimate level of achievement. Hence, the relationship between beliefs and language learning achievement is not only one-directional, but reciprocal; beliefs are considered to influence language learning outcomes and vice versa. This is corresponding to Wen and Johnson's (1997) conceptual model of factors affecting language learning. The model shows a causal, direct relationship between gender, the first language proficiency, vocabulary, learning strategies, the second language proficiency, and the second language learning achievement. Similarly, Abraham and Vann (1987) comment that learners' beliefs determine approaches and consequent strategies the learners take when learning a second/foreign language. Thus, it is a combination of beliefs, approaches, and strategies that determine success or failure at language learning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

This study investigated the perceptions of Thai graduate students of their English learning beliefs and strategies and explored the influence of learning beliefs and strategies on learning achievement (measured in terms of students' self-rated English proficiency). Corresponding to the objectives, three research questions were also developed:

1) What beliefs do the graduate students hold about learning English?
2) What learning strategies do the graduate students use for learning English? and
3) What are the relationships among beliefs, learning strategies, and learning achievement of the graduate students?

Data Collection

This study obtained data through two methods: questionnaires and individual interviews. The first part of the questionnaire contained closed questions regarding the students' demographic information, English-learning backgrounds, and self-rated language achievement. 220 student participants were asked to indicate their agreement to 34 statement items adapted from the structure of Horwitz's (1987) Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) and their frequency of use to 50 statement items adapted from Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) on a five-point rating

scale. The students were also requested to rate their achievement using 3 different levels: high, intermediate, and low. In response to the open question at the end of the questionnaire, more than half of the students (126 out of 220) gave additional views on the relationships among beliefs, strategies, and achievement of English language learning. The information provided was considered useful for further investigation in the following stage of in-depth interviews with 35 students.

Data Analysis

Several statistical approaches: *descriptive statistics, factor analysis, Pearson r correlations*, and *Cronbach's alpha* test were used for quantitative data analysis for the questionnaire. Qualitative data from the open-ended question and the semi-structured interviews were content analysed by using the interpretive analysis methods of *topic ordering* and *constructing categories*. The interview data were considered together with the questionnaire data.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses of the BALLI

In response to Research Question 1, descriptive statistics were used to analyse the students' responses to the BALLI items categorized into five major areas: 1) *English language aptitud*e; 2) *Difficulty of language learning*; 3) *Nature of language learning*; 4) *Learning and communication strategies*; and 5) *Motivation and expectation*.

Regarding English language aptitude, 80% of the students felt that it was easier for children than for adults to learn English and almost three quarters believed that some people had a special ability for learning English. 67% of the students strongly agreed that everyone can learn to speak English. In the area of difficulty of English language learning, most of the students (72%) agreed that English was easier to learn than other languages. It was surprising that only a few students (9%) considered English to be a very difficult language to learn. The perceived beliefs of the students towards the nature of English language learning were more varied and somewhat contradictory to each other. The majority of many students (79%) believed that knowing about English speaking cultures was important to speaking English. Only a very small percentage (15%) of the students strongly endorsed grammar as important in English language learning. Nevertheless, quite a large number of the students (67%) believed that memorisation was important for English language learning. Considering the importance of vocabulary in language learning, almost half of the students (47%) supported its importance. For the beliefs about learning and communication strategies, the majority of students (91%) agreed that it is important to repeat and practice a great deal. For motivation and expectations, a large number of the students (89%) believed that Thai people considered it was important to speak English well and 85% of the students agreed that they would have better opportunities for a good job if they learned English very well.

Factor Analysis of the BALLI

In order to refine the factor dimensions, the application of the scree plot test was employed. As a result, there were four factors accounted for 35% of the total variance for the student participants. For Belief Factor 1, labeled as motivation for and nature of learning English, the students agreed on the importance of repetition and practice in English learning, speaking English with excellent accent, the important role of English in future careers, and the value of practice with audio media. However, other additional beliefs were found, such as the importance of having cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries and guessing unknown English words. For Belief Factor 2, the students felt very strongly that speaking English was easier than understanding it, and were motivated to learn the language to get to know native speakers of English and their cultures better. Self-efficacy and confidence included beliefs about the level of difficulty in learning English, the enjoyment of practicing English with the native speakers of English, beliefs about confidence in learning to speak English very well, and so on. All items in Factor 2 were negatively correlated with feeling awkward when speaking English with other people ($r = -.520$), indicating that the higher the self-confidence and efficacy, the less uncertain the students were when speaking English. Many items in Belief Factor 3 consistently reflected formal English language learning. The students valued translation, grammar, and vocabulary learning, memorisation in language learning, as well as stringent error correction. For Belief Factor 4, the stu-

dents believed in special abilities for English language learning, gender superiority in learning English, and the relative case in learning a particular language. They also accorded with children's superiority in language learning abilities, believing in "*the-younger-the-better*" theory in English language learning.

Descriptive Analyses of the SILL

In response to Research Question 2, descriptive statistics were employed to examine the students' responses to the SILL items categorised into high, medium, and low usage. 81% of the students had medium to high usage of learning strategy. (Table 1)

For memory strategies, 58% of the students stated that they hardly used new English words in a sentence to remember them and never or seldom reviewed English lessons. For cognitive strategies, 50% of the students were very unlikely to start conversations in English. In addition, the majority of the students did not prefer to write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English. Considering compensation strategies, 64% of the students always used guessing for unfamiliar English words for compre-

hension purposes. A number of the students (58%) always or almost always employed synonyms for unknown English words in expressive contexts. For the metacognitive strategies, 55% always or almost always thought about their progress in English learning. Interestingly, 43% of the students responded that they had never or almost never looked up new words if they did not know the right ones in English.

Affective strategies were the least used of the six strategy categories. The students usually showed high negative responses in affective strategies; for example, 47% of them never tried to ease when they were anxious for using English. Regarding social strategies of English language learning, 63% of the students always or almost always asked English speakers and/or native English speakers to reduce the speed or repeat when not understanding something in English. However, a large number of students (71%) had never or almost never practiced English with other students, English speakers, and/or native English speakers. In addition, 62% of the students never or almost never made inquiries in English to other students, English speakers, and/or native speakers of English.

Table 1: Means of Learning Strategy Use

Usage	Graduate Students	
	N	%
High ($M > 3.5$)	33	15.0
Medium ($3.4 < M > 2.5$)	145	66.0
Low ($M \leq 2.4$)	42	19.0
Total (N)	**220**	**100.0**

Table 2 below presents the high usage category of English learning strategy of the students. This indicates that most of the students almost always or always repeated or wrote new English words several times when learning new vocabulary, used synonyms for unknown words, and thought about their progress in English language learning. Also, many students almost always or always made guesses to understand new words and asked English speakers or native English speakers to hold back or reiterate if they did not recognise the language.

Factor Analyses of the SILL

There were six factors accounted for learning strategies of the student respondents. Strategy Factor 1, social and practical practice, was highly correlated with items about asking questions in English to others, having a drill in English with others, asking for help, looking for people to talk to in English, starting conversation in English, and starting to learn about the culture of native English speakers. Practical practice strategies, such as watching TV shows and movies with English dialogues, as well as writing letters, messages, or notes in English were also assigned to the first factor.

The second Factor is metacognitive strategies, which allow learners to bring together their learning through planning, centering, and evaluating. The factor includes variables such as planning a study schedule, looking for chances to read in English, setting goals for improving English skills, trying to find out how to be a better English learner, and thinking about the advancement of English language learning. For Factor 3, the chosen items can be related to memory strategies, such as reviewing, creating sentences, making associations, and representing vocabulary use. The most loaded item includes visualisation as a memory. Considering Strategy Factor

Table 2: High Usage of English Learning Strategy

Rank	Categories	Mean (*M*)
1	Cognitive strategy *You say or write new English words several times.* (item 10)	3.72
2	Compensation strategy *You make guesses to understand unfamiliar English words.* (item 24)	3.70
3	Compensation strategy *If you cannot think of an English word, you use a word or phrase that means the same thing.* (item 29)	3.68
4	Social strategy *If you do not understand something in English, you ask the other person to slow down or say it again.* (item 45)	3.65
5	Metacognitive strategy *You think about your progress in learning English.* (item 38)	3.56

4, the students mainly focused on compensation strategies helping in getting better of limited knowledge of English by using gestures to continue conversation by the students, making guesses, using synonyms as substitutes for unknown words, and referencing the native language for related words.

Strategy Factor 5 comprises of only three items and indicates the use of cognitive strategies such as translating and summarising. The students included items such as trying not to translate word-for-word or look up the meaning of every unknown word, and making summaries of information. Strategy Factor 6 is labeled as affective strategies to represent the majority of items such as talking to someone else about his/her nervousness when learning or using English and self-rewarding when doing well in English. However, these strategies were least frequently used by the students, indicating that they were unlikely to use strategies to control their emotions in the process of English language learning.

Correlations of Learning Belief and Strategy Variables

Pearson r correlation coefficient tests were employed to investigate the relationships between the learners' beliefs and strategy use. As shown in Table 3, the four factors of beliefs and the six factors of strategies were significantly correlated with one another with correlation coefficients ranging from -.11 to .48. Beliefs about self-efficacy and confidence in English language learning (B2) and beliefs about foreign language aptitude (B4) were positively correlated with social and practice strategies (S1) (r = .47 and .27 respectively). Also, formal learning beliefs (B3) had a negative correlation with social and practical practice strategies (r = -.19). A moderate correlation was found in the relationship between beliefs about self-efficacy and confidence in learning English (B2) with metacognitive strategies (S2) (r = .27). Beliefs about motivation for and the nature of learning English (B1) and beliefs about formal learning (B3) had a weak correlation with metacognitive strategies (r = .27 and .13 respectively). (Table 3)

Overall, the strongest correlation was found between the students' beliefs about motivation for and the nature of learning English and compensation strategies (r = .48). On the contrary, the correlation between beliefs about foreign language aptitude and memory strategies was the weakest (r = .11, p < .05). Beliefs about self-efficacy and confidence in learning English

Table 3: Correlations of BALLI and SILL Factors

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
B1	.011	.179**	.121*	.480**	.049	.049
B2	.472**	.271**	.224**	.012	.154**	-.066
B3	-.194**	.125**	.034	-.075	-.083	.177**
B4	.274**	.025	-.110*	.020	.052	.127**

NB: B1 - B4 = beliefs Factor 1-4; S1 - S6 = strategies Factor 1-6
*Correlations are significant at p < .05 (2-tailed, N = 220)
**Correlations are significant at p < .01 (2-tailed, N = 220)

of the graduate students were closely correlated with most strategies (i.e., social and practical practice strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory strategies, and cognitive strategies), while the other three beliefs were correlated with very few.

Comparisons of Learning Strategies and Self-rated English Learning Achievement

Table 4 below shows means and standard deviations for six categories of strategies by level of self-rated English learning achievement. More than half of the students (54%) evaluated themselves as low achievers of English learning.

The graduate students who used compensation strategies more than other strategies ($M = 3.11$ and $M = 3.45$ respectively) rated themselves as intermediate achievers and low achievers of English language learning The intermediates were inclined to use affective strategies least ($M = 2.64$), whereas the low achievers reported the least use of social strategies ($M = 2.43$). The high achievers indicated high use of metacognitive strategies ($M = 3.70$) and least use of memory strategies ($M = 3.17$).

ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Through the coding process, the responses of the students to the open-ended question on the questionnaire and the interview can be placed into the following seven subcategories: 1) *Beliefs about English learning English*; 2) *Beliefs about practice and learning strategies*; 3) *Importance of learning English for communication*; 4) *English learning difficulty*; 5) *Importance of learning environment*; 6) *Motivation and confidence in English language learning*; and 7) *Others*.

Most of the students revealed their beliefs about practice and learning strategies, such as the importance of learning grammar to achieve a high proficiency of English, the importance of practicing English regularly, and the importance of being exposed to English as frequently as possible. From the interview, one student believed that English learning helped him to be more competitive in the international society, indicating the importance he perceived of the role of English globally as a communication tool. Many students also showed positive attitudes toward learning English, such as having no fear for making

Table 4: Means and Standard Deviations of Learning Strategies by Self-rated Learning Achievement

Learning Strategies	Low Achievers (54%)		Intermediate Achievers (43%)		High Achievers (3%)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Memory	2.59	.60	2.91	.60	3.17	.80
Cognitive	2.75	.49	3.25	.58	3.59	.57
Compensation	3.11	.58	3.45	.66	3.55	.65
Metacognitive	2.74	.60	3.29	.69	3.70	.91
Affective	2.46	.60	2.64	.66	3.35	.92
Social	2.43	.68	2.97	.87	3.30	1.03

mistakes when using English, striving for high proficiency in English, and making an effort to learn English. Five participants also remarked that learning English needed a high level of effort and another two students commented that there was no short-cut to become a good language learner. This can be implied that learning the language required a great deal of time and effort.

Regarding beliefs about motivation and confidence in English learning, almost all of the students emphasised that confidence was essential in learning English. Seven students commented that learning English in a classroom (i.e., grammar and reading comprehension) was not usually helpful for communicating in English. Rather, learning English by using it for communicative purposes could be more practical. Considering the importance of learning environment, three students agreed that learning environment plays an important role in English language learning as one of them stated, "*Learning English in English speaking countries is the best way to learn and achieve the language*". and "*It is easy to learn English in a natural setting*". Two responses regarding the opinion about English education in Thailand were grouped into the "others" subcategories. One student suggested that the Thai government should provide additional free English classes and facilities for English practice. Another student pointed out the need for improved English language teaching or learning methods in Thailand.

The responses of the students to the open-ended question on the questionnaire and the interview questions can be grouped into eight subcategories of learning strate-gies: 1) *Formal practice*; 2) *Practical practice*; 3) *Cognitive*; 4) *Metacognitive*; 5) *Compensation*; 6) *Memory*; 7) *Social*; and 8) *Others*. From the interview, some students reported their own learning strategies which were not on the SILL. Regarding functional and formal practice strategies, three students commented that they practiced English by using the Internet to chat with native English speakers. Several other unique learning strategies were reported by a number of students: listening to English songs and singing them as often as possible; writing down dialogues from the movies; and attending classes taught by native English speakers. A compensation strategy use was also included, such as using a dictionary when finding unknown words and analysing the prefixes and suffixes of new words. Four responses from the students concerned the ideal environment for learning English, such as studying English in a country where English is spoken as a native language, or getting jobs at international companies to learn and practice English.

DISCUSSION

The graduate students used a variety of language learning strategies when learning English and reported similarities and differences in strategy use. Although the context of formal English learning at graduate level in this study appears to be less favourable than those in other international academic institutes, the students who rated themselves as high achieving English language learners showed higher use of learning strategies than those considering them-

selves low achievers. From the interview, the researcher realised that the high achieving English language learners could use English as well as Thai. This is paralleled to what other researchers (e.g., Nations and McLaughlin, 1986; Nayak et al., 1990) concluded that high achieving English language learners have greater potential to learn a new language. Although evidence of English proficiency which is usually measured by standardised tests was not available in this current study, higher self-reported learning achievement of the high achieving students was shown. Indeed, these students had greater ability to learn a new language as claimed.

Various opinions about English language learning were revealed. For instance, the students held strong instrumental motivation for learning English because of self-imposed or other pressures at home, academic purposes and better job opportunities rather than the purpose of social interaction. Another interesting conclusion is that not only did a learning context influence on the students' beliefs but also social trends in English language learning regarding the advantages of English fluency.

A diversity of language use in daily life is another factor making differences in students' beliefs and their strategy use. Some degree of English fluency for the high achieving students was compulsory for communicative reasons. English language acquisition at an early age was encouraged at all social, educational, and economic levels in their living contexts. This, therefore, could influence the high achievers' views on English language learning. Also, Horwitz's (1987) argument for the significance of the students' learning experiences

is applicable to this present study. Different learning experiences of the students from a variety of English learning backgrounds are likely to be one of the factors affecting the students' beliefs

Significant correlations between learners' beliefs on English learning and their use of learning strategy indicate that the beliefs to some extent relate to strategy use in both parallel and inverse ways. However, all of which are logical relationships. Beliefs of the students concerned self-efficacy and confidence in English learning notably correlated to most learning strategies. This can be implied that the higher the students' feelings of efficacy and confidence in English learning, the higher the frequency of strategy use and a variety of strategy use. This is likely a mutual relationship, which can be denoted that when language abilities grow, so does confidence and others.

Beliefs of the intermediate achieving and the low achieving students about motivation for the nature of English learning are also notably associated with their compensation strategy use while those of the high achieving students had extensive correlations with cognitive strategies. Additionally, some beliefs of the students negatively influenced on the use of learning strategies, indicating that in some cases the students' beliefs are possibly confined to the use of learning strategies. For example, the students with strong beliefs in the importance of formal learning were inclined not to use social strategies. Similarly, Yang (1992) reported that there was a reciprocal correlation between learners' beliefs and strategy use which could be existed instead of a causal relationship between them. In-

deed, learners' beliefs to some extent have an effect on their strategy use.

By and large, the findings of this study can be a useful reminder that not only the students' beliefs about language learning affect the use of learning strategies, but also their English learning achievement influences the frequency of use and choice of learning strategies and beliefs about English language learning.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Students' beliefs on English language learning and the flexible use of English learning strategies during the process of re-structuring in-take information have an important role in information processing in English learning. In the socio-cultural perspective, human knowledge is set in the social and physical context as well as implicit and explicit socialisation practices of learners are engaged in constructing language and literacy. To support this, the studies of O'Conner and Michaels (1996) and Rogoff (1998) emphasise that it is not possible to separate human behaviours from their contexts as specific behaviours take place in a specific social and cultural setting. In this regard, socio-affective approaches of language learners can help contribute development and construct new knowledge in English language learning.

Most students in this study question the effectiveness of traditional learning (e.g., grammar learning and translation learning) and modest use of social and practical practice strategies. Instead, they perceive communicative language teaching to be more useful and suitable for language learning.

Such communicative methodologies in fact encompass eclectic ways of teaching from myriad methods. They furthermore are rooted not only in one but a range of theories and are motivated by research findings in second language acquisition (SLA) as well as cognitive and educational psychology (Wharton, 2000). It is also possible to claim that traditional methods do not seem to work with these students in this learning context as they may not be able to meet the students' learning goals and needs. Therefore, based on the students' reflections on effective teaching methodology, teachers should focus on classroom activities based on the concepts of communicative teaching and learning. Moreover, teachers should encourage their students to use strategies involving realistic practice which helps develop their communicative competence. This may cultivate an approach to student-centred learning of English in the Thai graduate context. One important note here is the possible lack of understanding that the low achieving students expressed regarding the challenging nature of English language learning, that is, they should be concerned with developing their greater achievement of English language learning. Teachers, especially those of the intermediate achievers and low achievers of English, have to direct their students to plan and schedule possible time frames for reviewing and practicing English.

Socio-cultural implications focus on attention to the fact that graduate students in a Thai university context are from various backgrounds, such as different levels of English proficiency, different types of schooling or instruction, and different En-

glish learning experience in secondary and undergraduate levels. This can affect the students' beliefs about English language learning and their choices of learning strategies. It is apparent that the students considering themselves as high achievers have high potential or superior abilities in English learning like bilinguals (Bialystok, 2001; Nayak et al., 1990). Therefore, foreign language educators and curriculum developers of graduate programmes in Thailand have to take into account that English language learning is not likely to be successful in a Thai graduate context. Hence, any attempts to formulate foreign language curricula at national level should take such factors into account. In addition, publishers of learning materials at all levels of English proficiency should be well aware of the beliefs and different approaches to English language learning of the graduate students whose proficiency in English can be advantages.

This study also suggests that the investigation of students' beliefs should be combined with strategy training carried out in regular English classes. This is in accordance with Khaldieh's (2000) and Bialystok's (2001) findings that examining beliefs about language learning and ESL learners' perceptions of strategy instruction is worthwhile as it can be very beneficial for ESL classroom activities and for real life purposes. A strategy-based instruction, for example, could be used with the aim of supporting students to develop more effective learning strategies and practical ideas for their learning in due course. Many prior studies also argued about the effectiveness of appropriate strategy training on learners' autonomous and independent

learning approaches (e.g., Chamot, 2001; O'Malley et al., 1985; Oxford et al., 2004; Wenden, 1991). In this regard, strategy training in classroom could contribute to enhancing an awareness of the students about good English learning strategies in the most efficient way. As a result, this cold help improve their English proficiency on the whole. For belief and strategy training, teachers should explicitly concentrate on issues of effective strategy use and mistaken or unrealistic beliefs about English language learning through activities, such as classroom discussions about learning English. After identifying the students' beliefs with reference to English language learning, teachers should implement practical procedures to prevail over mistaken beliefs and put emphasis on beliefs that smoothen the progress of English language learning.

For classroom implications, this study gives additional support to other studies proving that there are relationships between learning strategies and learning achievement. Teachers must embrace these relationships and make use of strategies that have a positive correlation with English learning achievement as an integral part of their teaching practices. At the start, teachers may consider the unexpectedly low use of the strategies. Then, they should encourage their students to avoid learning English by translating word-for-word, but instead to write notes, letters, messages and reports in English. This is in accordance with the research findings of Takeuchi (2002) pointing that these two strategies have a correlation with high achieving students, so teachers should support the use of these strategies.

Further, teachers must consider whether they should explicitly ask the individual student about his/her learning strategies or use a more subtle way to find out beneficial strategy use of their students in English classes. Self analysis methods, such as the SILL, may be used as a means of determining which individuals' learning strategies are the most effective. Then, teachers should provide their students with useful advice on the use of strategies. The other approach is for teachers to use more integrated techniques by paying less attention to individuals' learning approaches. Instead, teachers offer a learning strategy model which would be the most beneficial to all students in class as well as present other language points as part of the normal teaching process. Oxford and Nyikos (1989) favor the latter approach, stating that students have a better understanding of learning when language content is integrated with strategies for making incoming teaching and learning materials more retrievable, memorable, and comprehensible.

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