

**THE LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF LOW
ACHIEVERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND
LANGUAGE IN MALAYSIA**

RASHIDAH BEGAM BINTI O.A.RAJAK

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN MALAYSIA**

By

RASHIDAH BEGAM BINTI O. A. RAJAK

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

October 2004

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my late father whose never ending inspiration made me pursue my career in the field of education, and my late mother whose constant prayers helped me complete this dissertation...

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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October 2004

Chairman: Associate Professor Mohd. Faiz bin Abdullah, Ph. D.

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

The effective use of language learning strategies by second language learners plays an important role in overcoming difficulties in communication for both written and spoken purposes and to enhance their proficiency in the language. Hence, the present study investigated the language learning strategies used by 320 low achieving learners of ESL (English as a Second Language) from both urban and rural schools in the state of Selangor, Malaysia. Data obtained via a Respondent Background questionnaire and interviews indicated the low achievers' perceived reasons for learning the English language. Most of them indicated that they had the interest in learning the English language. The SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) questionnaire was used to elicit responses on the use of language learning strategies by low achieving learners of ESL and the differences in terms of strategy use between urban and rural low achievers. The overall results obtained demonstrated that the low achieving learners did use language learning strategies but their use was generally of moderate frequency. There was also evidence that urban learners used memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective,

and social language learning strategies more often at moderate levels than rural learners who indicated rather low levels of the activity. Results obtained via interviews with teachers indicated that they were not aware of language learning strategies. They also expressed that the low achieving learners did not show interest in the English language lessons. Strategy training was also conducted in this study to determine the extent of benefit that could be derived by low achievers from such training. Results obtained from this quasi-experimental phase of the study revealed that low achieving learners who participated in the training performed better in both written and spoken aspects of language use in the post-tests than those who were not provided the training. Learners' perception of the strategy training was also positive and they expressed that they benefited from the training. Hence, the findings of the study underscore the need for strategy training especially for low achieving learners of ESL, which may be included in the school curriculum for TESL.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi syarat untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA DI KALANGAN PELAJAR
BERPENCAPAIAN RENDAH DALAM PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA INGGERIS
SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA DI MALAYSIA**

Oleh

RASHIDAH BEGAM BT O. A. RAJAK

Oktober 2004

Pengerusi: Profesor Madya Mohd. Faiz Bin Abdullah, Ph.D.

Fakulti: Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi

Penggunaan strategi pembelajaran bahasa yang efektif oleh pelajar bahasa kedua memainkan peranan yang penting dalam mengatasi kesukaran berkomunikasi bagi tujuan penulisan dan pertuturan. Oleh itu, kajian ini meninjau strategi pembelajaran bahasa yang digunakan oleh 320 orang pelajar berpencapaian rendah dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua di beberapa buah sekolah bandar dan luar bandar di negeri Selangor, Malaysia. Maklumat yang diperolehi melalui soal selidik latar belakang responden dan temu bual menunjukkan alasan dan keperluan pelajar berpencapaian rendah untuk belajar bahasa Inggeris. Kebanyakan daripada mereka menyatakan minat terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris. Soal selidik SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) telah digunakan untuk mendapat respons pelajar berpencapaian rendah dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua tentang penggunaan strategi pembelajaran bahasa dan untuk mengenal pasti perbezaan dari segi penggunaan strategi antara pelajar berpencapaian rendah dari bandar dan luar bandar. Keputusan

keseluruhan yang diperoleh menunjukkan bahawa pelajar berpencapaian rendah memang menggunakan strategi pembelajaran bahasa tetapi penggunaan itu hanya pada tahap sederhana sahaja. Terdapat juga bukti bahawa pelajar dari bandar lebih kerap menggunakan strategi pembelajaran memori, kognitif, metakognitif, afektif, dan sosial berbanding pelajar dari luar bandar. Dapatan yang diperoleh melalui temu bual dengan guru menunjukkan bahawa mereka tidak sedar akan strategi pembelajaran bahasa. Mereka juga memberitahu bahawa pelajar berpencapaian rendah tidak menunjukkan minat dalam pelajaran bahasa Inggeris. Latihan strategi juga dijalankan dalam kajian ini untuk mengenal pasti sejauh mana pelajar berpencapaian rendah mendapat manfaat daripada latihan tersebut. Dapatan daripada fasa eksperimen kuasi menunjukkan bahawa pelajar berpencapaian rendah yang mengambil bahagian dalam latihan memperlihatkan pencapaian yang lebih baik dalam kedua-dua aspek tulisan dan lisan dari segi penggunaan bahasa dalam ujian pasca berbanding dengan pelajar yang tidak diberi latihan. Persepsi pelajar tentang latihan strategi juga adalah positif dan mereka mengatakan bahawa mereka memperoleh manfaat daripada latihan tersebut. Oleh itu, dapatan kajian ini menyarankan keperluan latihan strategi terutamanya untuk pelajar berpencapaian rendah dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua yang mungkin boleh dimuatkan dalam kurikulum pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua di sekolah-sekolah.

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I certify that an Examination Committee met on 4 October 2004 to conduct the final examination of **Rashidah Begam Bt O.A. Rajak** on her **Doctor of Philosophy** thesis entitled '**The Language Learning Strategies of Low Achievers of English as a Second Language in Malaysia**' in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

Mardziah Hayati Abdullah, Ph.D.

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Rosli Talif, Ph.D.

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Shameem Rafik-Galea, Ph.D.

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Shanta Nair Venugopal, Ph.D.

Professor
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
(Independent Examiner)

ZAKARIAH ABD. RASHID, Ph.D.

Professor/Deputy Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 20 DEC 2004

This thesis submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee are as follows:

Mohd. Faiz Bin Abdullah, Ph.D.

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Wong Bee Eng, Ph.D.

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Chan Swee Heng, Ph.D.

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

AINI IDERIS, Ph.D.

Professor/Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

RASHIDAH BEGAM BINTI O.A.RAJAK

Date: 29 NOVEMBER 2004

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ABSTRAK	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
APPROVAL	viii
DECLARATION	x
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES	xvii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xix
LIST OF APPENDICES	xx
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background to the Study	1
1.2 Statement of Research Problem	10
1.3 Research Questions	13
1.4 Purpose of the Study	14
1.5 Theoretical Framework	15
1.6 Limitations of the Study	23
1.7 Significance of the Study	25
1.8 Definition of Terms	26
1.8.1 Language Learning Strategies	26
1.8.2 Strategy Training	27
1.8.3 Low Achieving Learners/Low Achievers	27
1.8.4 Principal Strategies	28
1.8.5 Reasons for Learning English	29
1.9 Outline of the Dissertation	29
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	31
2.1 Introduction	31
2.2 Second Language Acquisition	32
2.2.1 Learner-external Factors	33
2.2.2 Learner-internal Factors	36
2.3 Language Learning Strategies	43
2.4 Overview of Language Learning Strategies	47
2.5 Research in Language Learning Strategies	51

2.5.1	Rubin's (1981) Classification of Language Learning Strategies	53
2.5.2	Willing's (1988) Categories of Language Learning Strategies	56
2.5.3	Bialystok's (1978) Categories of Language Learning Strategies	57
2.5.4	Ellis' (1985) Categories of Language Learning Strategies	57
2.5.5	O'Malley's (1985) Classification of Language Learning Strategies	58
2.5.6	Oxford's (1990) Classification of Language Learning Strategies	61
2.5.7	Stern's (1992) Classification of Language Learning Strategies	64
2.6	Findings of Studies Related to Language Learning Strategies	66
2.7	Importance of Language Learning Strategies in Language Learning and Teaching	75
2.8	Good Language Learners	79
2.9	Teachability of Language Learning Strategies	82
2.9.1	Oxford's (1994) Suggestion of L2 Strategy Training Principles	93
2.9.2	The Teacher's Role in Strategy Training	94
2.10	Conclusion	97
3	METHODOLOGY	99
3.1	Introduction	99
3.2	Research Approach	100
3.3	Target Population and the Samples of the Study	102
3.3.1	Target Population	102
3.3.2	Sample and Sampling Techniques	103
3.4	Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures	105
3.4.1	Questionnaire	106
3.4.2	Interviews	113
3.4.3	The Quasi-experimental Study	116
3.4.3.1	Design Issues	116
3.4.3.2	The Training Sessions	120
3.5	Mode of Data Analysis	133
3.5.1	Respondent Background Questionnaire	135
3.5.2	SILL Questionnaire	137
3.5.3	Interviews	140
3.5.4	Quasi-experimental Study	140
3.6	The Pilot Study	142
4	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (1)	145
4.1	Introduction	145
4.2	Data Obtained in Questionnaires	146
4.2.1	Background of Respondents	146

4.2.1.1	Gender and Ethnicity	147
4.2.1.2	Languages Habitually Spoken at Home	147
4.2.1.3	Grade Obtained for English in PMR Examination	148
4.2.1.4	Respondents' Interest in Learning the English language	149
4.2.1.5	Respondents' Reasons for Learning the English Language	150
4.2.2	Language Learning Strategies Employed by Respondents	151
4.2.2.1	Analysis of Principal Strategies Used by the Respondents	152
4.2.2.2	Strategy Use by Urban and Rural Low Achieving Learners of ESL	166
4.3	Results of the Interviews	177
4.3.1	Perceptions of Teachers Related to Language Learning Strategies and Learners' Interest in Learning The English Language	178
4.3.2	Perceptions of Low Achieving Learners' Reasons for and Interest in Learning the English Language	180
5	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (2)	187
5.1	Introduction	187
5.2	Written Task	188
5.2.1	Inter-rater Reliability	189
5.2.2	Written Task Scores for Pre- and Post-tests	191
5.3	Spoken Task	196
5.3.1	Inter-rater Reliability	196
5.3.2	Spoken Task Scores for Pre- and Post-tests	197
5.4	Low Achievers' Perceptions about the Strategy Training	204
5.5	Synoptic Discussion of the Results	208
6	CONCLUSION	218
6.1	Introduction	218
6.2	Summary	218
6.3	Conclusions	221
6.3.1	Strategy Use by Learners	221
6.3.2	Strategy Training	222
6.4	Implications of the Findings	224
6.5	Suggestions for Further Research	226
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	229
	APPENDICES	248
	BIODATA OF THE AUTHOR	405

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
4.1	Languages Spoken at Home (N=320)	148
4.2	PMR Grade Obtained for English in Rank Order (N320)	149
4.3	Reasons for Learning English (N=320)	150
4.4	Rating Scale for Frequency of Language Learning Strategies Use	152
4.5	Language Learning Strategies in Order of Frequency of Use from Highest to Lowest (N=320)	153
4.6	Use and Non-use of Strategies	165
4.7	Differences in Use of Categories of Strategies by Urban and Rural Learners	167
4.8	Strategy Use by Urban and Rural Learners	167
4.9	Frequency of Use of Memory Strategies by Urban and Rural Low Achievers	169
4.10	Frequency of Use of Cognitive Strategies by Urban and Rural Low Achievers	169
4.11	Frequency of Use of Compensation Strategies by Urban and Rural Low Achievers	170
4.12	Frequency of Use of Metacognitive Strategies by Urban and Rural Low Achievers	170
4.13	Frequency of Use of Affective Strategies by Urban and Rural Low Achievers	170
4.14	Frequency of Use of Social Strategies by Urban and Rural Low Achievers	171
4.15	Memory Strategies that are Significantly Different in Terms of Use between Urban and Rural Low Learners	172

4.16	Cognitive Strategies that are Significantly Different in Terms of Use between Urban and Rural Low Learners	172
4.17	Compensation Strategy that is Significantly Different in Terms of Use between Urban and Rural Low Learners	173
4.18	Metacognitive Strategies that are Significantly Different in Terms of Use between Urban and Rural Low Learners	173
4.19	Affective Strategy that is Significantly Different in Terms of Use between Urban and Rural Low Learners	174
4.20	Social Strategies that are Significantly Different in Terms of Use between Urban and Rural Low Achieving Learners	174
4.21	Non-use of Strategies by Urban and Rural Learners	175
4.22	Typology of Non-Use of Strategies by Urban and Rural Low Achieving Learners of ESL	176
5.1	Categories for Written Task Scores	189
5.2	Overall Inter-rater Reliability Results for Written Pre-test	190
5.3	Overall Inter-rater Reliability Results for Written Post-test	190
5.4	Inter-rater Reliability between Raters for Written Pre-test	191
5.5	Inter-rater Reliability between Raters for Written Post-test	191
5.6	Mean Scores Obtained by Experimental and Comparison Groups in Written Pre-test	192
5.7	Mean Scores Obtained by Experimental and Comparison Groups in Written Post-test	192
5.8	Differences in Mean Total Scores Obtained by Experimental and Comparison Groups in Written Pre- and Post-tests	193
5.9	Differences in Mean Total Scores Obtained for Task Fulfillment and Language in Written Pre- and Post-tests	1 193
5.10	Ratings Obtained by Experimental and Comparison Groups in Written Pre-test	195
5.11	Ratings Obtained by Experimental and Comparison Groups In Written Post-test	195

5.12	Overall Inter-rater Reliability Results for Spoken Pre and Post-tests	197
5.13	Scores Obtained by Experimental Group 1 in Spoken Pre and Post-tests	198
5.14	Scores Obtained by Experimental Group 2 in Spoken Pre and Post-tests	198
5.15	Scores Obtained by Comparison Group 1 in Spoken Pre and Post-tests	198
5.16	Scores Obtained by Comparison Group 2 in Spoken Pre and Post-tests	198
5.17	Mean Score Obtained by Experimental and Comparison Groups in Spoken Pre-tests	199
5.18	Mean Score Obtained by Experimental and Comparison Groups in Spoken Post-tests	199
5.19	Overall Total Percentage of Scores Obtained by Experimental and Comparison Groups for Spoken Task in Pre- and Post-tests	200

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
2.1	Features of Language Learning Strategies	44
2.2	Summary of Oxford's (1990) Classification of Language Learning Strategies	63
2.3	Oxford's Eight-step Model for Strategy Training	90
3.1	Overall Design Schematic of the Quasi-Experimental Study	120
3.2	An Approach to Strategy Training	122
3.3	Structure of Strategy Training Sessions for Form Four Low Achieving Learners of ESL	127
3.4	Ratings for Response to the SILL Questionnaire	139
3.5	Ratings and Scale for Written and Spoken Pre and Post	141
3.6	Sample of Data Obtained from Pilot Study for Each of the Six SILL Categories	144
4.1	Respondents' Interest in Learning the English Language	149
4.2	Descriptions of Metacognitive Strategies	155
4.3	Descriptions of Social Strategies	156
4.4	Descriptions of Cognitive Strategies (I) for Reasoning and Analysing	157
4.5	Description of Cognitive Strategy (II) for Taking Down Notes and Making Summaries	158
4.6	Descriptions of Cognitive Strategies (III) for practising	159
4.7	Descriptions of Cognitive Strategies (IV) for Receiving and Sending Messages	159
4.8	Descriptions of Compensation Strategies (I) for Guessing Intelligently in Reading and Listening	161

4.9	Descriptions of Compensation Strategies (II) for Overcoming Limitations in Speaking and Writing	162
4.10	Descriptions of Affective Strategies	163
4.11	Descriptions of Memory Strategies	164
5.1	Question for Written and Spoken Tasks	188
5.2	Excerpts of Spoken Dialogues by Experimental and Comparison Groups at Pre and Post-test Stages	202

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACT	Adaptive Control of Thought
CALLA	Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach
EPRD	Educational Planning and Research Division
ESL	English as a Second Language
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MLAT	Modern Language Aptitude Test
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
<i>PMR</i>	<i>Penilaian Menengah Rendah</i> (Lower Secondary Evaluation)
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
<i>SPM</i>	<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i> (Malaysian Certificate of Education)
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TESL	Teaching of English as a Second Language

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix	Page
A Letter of Approval from EPRD	249
B Respondent Background Information Questionnaire	250
C The SILL Questionnaire	252
D Letter of Verification from DBP	256
E Translated SILL Questionnaire	257
F Interview Schedule	263
G Task Question for Written and Spoken Dialogues	264
H Strategy Training Materials	266
I Results Obtained via SILL Questionnaire in Pilot Study	289
J Transcripts of Interviews with Teachers	294
K Transcripts of Interviews with Students	302
L Scores Obtained in Pre and Post-tests for Written Task	313
M Scores Obtained in Pre and Post-tests for Spoken Task	315
N Transcriptions of Spoken Task Dialogues	316
O Written Pre-test Dialogues	324
P Written Post-test Dialogues	359

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

In this era of globalization and cyber technology, the whole world appears to be moving inexorably towards knowledge-based economies or K-Economy where the language used predominantly is English. In line with this general trend, Malaysia is at the threshold of shifting its economy to an intense global competition mode as is expected in this new century. The cold fact is that if we do not want to be left behind in the economic race, we have to be proficient in English and the sooner the better (*New Straits Times*, May 22, 2001). Malaysia's goal to become a developed nation will be harder to achieve if its people are not proficient in English which has become the international language for much of today's commerce and trade. What is equally important is that by and large, English is also the international language for science and technology. If Malaysia wants to build and strengthen its own scientific and technological infrastructure, the people must master English in order to keep pace with development elsewhere (*New Straits Times*, May 22, 2001). If we aspire to achieve the status of a developed nation within the time-frame set by the government, the people must acquire a measure of command of English. Otherwise their career paths will be stunted and as a country we will remain within the realm of 'developing' nations. To improve the command of English in our young, the syllabus specification for primary school English is quite clear:

“Malaysians are learning English increasingly as a language of international communication. The aim should therefore continue to be to teach children in such a way that they will be understood not only by fellow Malaysians, but also by speakers of English from other parts of the world...”(Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 1971).

English continues to be taught in Malaysia as an important second language to enable the nation to keep abreast with scientific and technological developments in the world and to participate meaningfully in international trade and commerce (Government of Malaysia, 1976). Learners are taught the English language to enable them to use the language in everyday life to further their studies and for work purposes. In the era of globalization, all Malaysians will need to be proficient in English as a medium for communicating with people from other countries. English is used in ICT to enable learners to access knowledge on the Internet and to network with people both locally and overseas (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2003). In the face of these global trends in education and training, there has been a strong decline in the level of proficiency in English in the country (Asmah, 1986; Gaudart, 1987; Vijay, 1999; Margaret, 1999; Azian Azuar, 1999). Cecilia (1998) highlighted the fact that considering the large amount of contact hours with English that a student has throughout his/her schooling life, there are still students who come out of the school system with very low proficiency in the language. This decline continues to be a cause for concern among educationists. As Martin (2000) says, the fact that the command of the English language among Malaysians has declined to a deplorable state has long been the bane of many quarters situated both within and without the education system in the country.

In spite of the status of English as a second language in Malaysia, English is still given much emphasis for use in various fields of development in the country. Hence, the Second Outline Perspective Plan 1991-2000 also stresses the development of communication skills in a second language which states that Malaysians should be well equipped with a strong base in education and training, including the ability to communicate in a second language, which is English, the international language of commerce (Jamaliah Mohd Ali, 2000). The importance of the English language was also stressed by Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamed, the former prime minister of Malaysia, when he expressed the concern that the teaching of the language must reach a desired level, especially in international communication (New Straits Times, December 3, 1994 in Jamaliah Mohd Ali, 2000). As such, it is important that a suitable approach to teaching the language should be worked out quickly and the existing methods enhanced. As Jamaliah Mohd Ali (2000) notes,

‘The success with which such (sic) a communicative goal is accomplished depends on the resources that the individual has at his disposal and this includes his proficiency in the language, his communicative abilities and skills...’ (p. 4).

With the importance given to the use of the English language, ESL teachers need to bear in mind the question ‘What can I do to help my students become proficient in English?’ In the process of developing their students’ communicative competence, ESL teachers encounter some students who seem to learn the language rather easily, while others apparently find learning English fraught with difficulties because learners are not aware of language learning strategies (Chamot, A. U. in Wenden, A. & Rubin, J., 1987). Hence, an investigation of language learning strategies among low achieving learners of