**VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, HANOI**

**UNIVERSITY OF LANGUAGES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND THE ETHNICITY OF NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY FROM CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY PERSPECTIVES**

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**SUMMARY OF PHD DISSERTATION**

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**PART ONE: INTRODUCTION**

**1. Rationale**

Language learning strategies (LLS) play a vital role in learning a second language (L2). They are specific actions or techniques that learners use to assist their progress in developing language skills. Use of appropriate learning strategies help learners to assimilate new information into their own learning and enables them to develop their understanding in mastering the forms, functions and culture required for the reception in the second language (Oxford, 1990).

Research results over the past decades have indicated that a key reason why many second language learners fail, while some learners do better with less effort, lies in various learner attributes such as personality traits, educational perspectives, motivation, cultural backgrounds, or language aptitude. It is also worth mentioning that types of strategies used by different learners vary due to stage of learning, teacher expectations, general learning styles, degree of awareness, teaching methods, text-books innovation, purpose for learning the language, and nationality or ethnicity (Bedell, 1993). To put it differently, a learner’s individual factors can influence which learning strategy the learners will use for their foreign language learning. Once well-managed, these variables can significantly contribute to a learner’s success in language learning. Many researchers (e.g., Reid, 1995; Wharton, 2000; Zhang, 2005; Rahimi and Riazi, 2005; Yang, 2010, Minh, 2012; Zeynali, 2012; and Salahshour and Sharifi, 2013) suggest that strategies of successful language learners can supply a basis for aiding language learners, and the conscious use of language learning strategies makes good language learners.

From my own experience as a teacher of English for more than 17 years with Thai Nguyen University (TNU), I am aware of the fact that students in general and ethnic students in particular are often confused to use their own strategies and abilities to transform their failing situations into successful learning experiences. In addition, I found that students with different individual identities study English in different ways and have different levels of proficiency. It seems that they are not what so called “lazy” and “not motivated”. Their language achievement may be affected by many individual factors and the culture which they inherited.

A large number of studies have focused on L2 learning with the main focus on individual differences in language learners as the work by Rubin (1975) who has considered LLS as one individual difference variable which gained increased popularity among positivist researchers in understanding how languages are learnt. Rubin (1975) identifies the strategies that the ‘good language learner’ uses and draws on this information to help less-effective learners. Learning strategies, in her opinion, have been in the centre of attention and gained great importance in the teaching-learning environment. Griffiths (2004) defines learning strategies as the specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferrable to new situations. Griffiths has a great concern with the relationship between LLSs and gender, which show language use and have mixed results.

Still within the field of LLS and gender, some studies show that there is difference of LLSs use based on the gender (Ehraman & Oxford, 1989; Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Zeynali, 2012; Salahshoura, Sharifib & Salahshour, 2013; Zarei, 2013). In such related studies, it was found that female students reporting all or some of six groups of LLSs more frequently than male (Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; Ghasedy, 1998; Goh & Foong, 1997; Green & Oxford, 1995; Hong-Nam & Learvell, 2006; Lan & Oxford, 2003; Lee & Oh, 2001; Oxford, 1989; Oxford, Nyikos & Ehrman ,1988; Politzer,1983; Zeynali, 2012). However, the other studies prove that gender does not affect the use of LLS (Griffiths, 2003; Lee & Oxford, 2008; Ziahossein & Salehi, 2008). Alongside the field of LLS, personality of individuals are affected through various variables such as culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1998), genetic and environmental factors (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985), sex differences (Budaev, 1999; Costa & McCare, 1992), and ethnicity (Griffiths, 1991; Hess & Azuma, 1991; Reid, 1995).

Recent research studies provide important support to claim that when students have the opportunity to clarify and assess their preferences with regards to definition of objectives and awareness of leaning preferences, their motivation, performances, and achievements will be increased and better. Since students are increasingly diverse, ethnicity has been considered as one of the key factors in determining LLS. In Vietnam, there are various ethnicities; nonetheless, English language is taught almost in the same manner for learners with different ethnical backgrounds.

Thai Nguyen University (TNU) is located in the northern midland and mountainous region where many ethnic minorities live in harmony for a long tradition, in which ethnic minorities accounted for 24% - the highest rate in the country with their own cultural identities. At present, TNU has a current enrollment of 90,000 students, of which there are about 65,000 undergraduate (55,000 full-time and 10,000 part-time) and others are professional vocational students. The annual application average is from 70-80,000 applications from various parts of the country, mostly from 16 northern upland provinces of Vietnam.

So far, in Vietnam, quite a few studies have been conducted to explore the use of LLS at tertiary level. None have explored the choice or use of LLS which is influenced by individual factors in order to provide enough information which aid both teachers and educators in planning and of individual and group instruction.

The present study examines the impact of ethnicity on LLS of TNU EFL learners in order to identify whether there is any meaningful relationship between the LLS and the learners’ ethnicity from cultural anthropology with regards to students’ gender, major field of study, level of English language proficiency and learning styles.

**2. Objectives of the study**

This study attempts to examine types and frequency of LLSs that TNU ethnic students reported employing and then determine whether there is a relationship between language learning strategies and the ethnicity of the TNU EFL learners from the cultural anthropology perspective. In other words, the purpose is to set up whether the learner’s ethnicity has any influence on their use of language learning strategies with regards to (i) gender, (ii) English language proficiency, (iii) major fields of study, and (iv) learning styles.

**3. Research questions**

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What English language learning strategies do the TNU ethnic students employ for their EFL learning?
2. What English language learning strategies are frequently used by the TNU ethnic students?
3. To what extent do the students’ choices of language learning strategies vary significantly with their gender, major fields of study, levels of proficiency and learning styles? If so, what are the main patterns of variation?

**4. Scope of the study**

The present study is carried out among the 2nd year students, who have enrolled at least 6 credits for general English at TNU. The participants of the study include students of different ethnic minority groups, who are studying for their BA degree at TNU. The focus of the investigation is on learning strategies, and the relationship between the choice of language learning strategies and the TNU ethnic students in terms of gender, English language proficiency, major fields of study and learning styles from cultural anthropology perspectives.

**5. Significance of the study**

This study particularly concentrates on the relations between the choice of the ethnic students’ English LLS with reference to their gender, English language proficiency, major fields of study and learning styles.

The analyses of the explored strategies from the cultural anthropology perspectives would provide EFL teachers in Vietnam with insights into the students’ learning strategies so that they would design appropriate activities or tasks that scaffold student learning.

**6. Design of the study**

The study is organized around three parts: Part I, Part II, and Part III

Part I – Introduction – presents rationale for the study, aim of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study, definition of key terminologues, and organization of the study.

Part II – Development – comprises four chapters: Chapter 1 – Literature Review, Chapter 2 – Methodology, and Chapter 3 – Findings and Discussions.

Part III – Conclusion – recapitulates what has been investigated, draws conclusions from major findings, points out limitations of the study, and makes some suggestions for further research. Special recommendations will be made on what should be done to increase the ability of implementation of the English textbooks.

**PART TWO: DEVELOPMENT**

**CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW**

**1.1.** **Introduction**

Researchers have considered many aspects: e.g., what makes a good language learner; how learners process new information; what kind of strategies they employ to understand; to learn or to retrieve the information; and what factors affect the learners’ choice of LLS use. There have been many research works concerning what makes a good language learner: e.g., Stern (1975); Rubin (1975); Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern and Todesco (1978); Ramirez (1986); Chamot and Küpper (1989); O’Malley and Chamot (1990); Oxford and Cohen (1992); and Griffiths (2008).

Many research works have then explored the types and the nature of strategy use, the effectiveness (if any) of LLS training. However, as stated by Phakiti (2003, p.7), “To date, there is little empirical evidence to show how language learning strategies are related to actual strategy use in context.” This opinion was also asserted by Rees-Millers (1993, p.11) “Until empirical data, particularly in the form of empirical studies are gathered to answer questions about the usefulness of learner training, teachers should approach the implementation of learner training in the classroom.” Therefore, it is necessary to conduct more research work in the field of LLS of EFL language learners in the specific context in order to help learners choose the proper LLSs in acquiring the target language, especially in the settings of mountainous areas.

**1.2. Language Learning Strategies Definitions**

Difficulties in defining LLS remain even at the basic level of terminology, each individual researcher define LLS in different ways such as ‘technique’, ‘tactic’ and ‘skill’. These definitions are sometimes overlap and conflict to each other. Just as Oxford (1989) defines the term as ‘behaviours’ or actions. This means LLS is observable, whereas Weinstein and Mayer (1986) argues LLS involve both behaviours and thoughts (unobservable).

The nature of what is LLS is also an argument among researchers. Stern (1983, as cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 531) describes the nature of learning strategies as general and overall when he defines that “strategy is best reserved for general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by the language learners, leaving techniques as the term to refer to particular forms of observable learning behavior” while Wenden (1987) argues that LLS is not about general approach of learners. He claims that LLS refers “specific actions or techniques”. (Wenden, 1987, p. 7).

It appears that all these researchers identify language learning strategies as techniques used to acquire knowledge, gain success and enjoy the learning of a second language. They are self-controlled, can be general or specific, cognitive or affective. Nevertheless, the definitions are still very ambiguous, broad and lack clarity. Macaro (2006) calls this her strongest attack on strategy research when she says, “Even the cognitive learning strategies, such as seeking meaning, using deduction, inferencing, or monitoring, are defined so broadly that it is questionable whether they can be specified in terms of observable, specific, universal behaviors that could be taught to or assessed in students.” (p.681). Macaro (2007, p.54) calls the definitions “loose” and bunched together with all sorts of learner behaviors. According to him, these loose definitions of LLSs have meant that strategies have been confused, or used interchangeably, with ‘processes’, or they have been juxtaposed with ‘processes’ but the differences between them never defined, however, each researcher proposes a definition according to the context, and the setting or the subject characteristic in which the research has been conducted.

Altogether, the researcher agrees with Liang (2009) that LLS has some characteristics as follows.

* Learning strategies are either behavioral thus observable, or mental then not observable.
* Learning strategies could be either general approaches or specific actions or techniques adopted to learn a Target Language (TL).
* Learners are generally aware of what approaches or techniques they have used in language learning, despite some subconscious activities under certain circumstances. (p.27**)**

**1.3. Language Learning Strategy Classifications**

Oxford (1990) describes language learning strategies as specific, self-directed steps taken by learners to enhance their own learning. She separates strategies into two strategy orientations and six strategies groups: (1) direct learning orientation, consisting of (a) memory, (b) cognitive, and (c) linguistic deficiency compensation strategy groups, and (2) an indirect learning orientation, consisting of (a) metacognitive, (b) affective, and (c) social strategy groups. There are some other ways of classifying language learning strategies (Wong – Fillmore, 1979; Rubin 1981; Skehan 1989; Ellis 1997). Chamot (1990) presents three major classes of strategies: (a) metacognitive, (b) cognitive, and (c) socio-affective. Language learning strategies have been classified as (a) meta-cognitive, cognitive, or socio-affective (e.g., Brown & Palinscar, 1982; Chamot, 1987; O’Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, 1985) or (b) direct or indirect (e.g., Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975, 1981).

Although Oxford’s classification is “perhaps the most comprehensive classification of learning strategies to date” (Ellis, 1994, p.539), it is still, of necessity, somewhat selective since “dozens and perhaps hundreds of such strategies exist” (Oxford, Lavine and Crookall, 1989, p.29). Oxford (1990) acknowledges the possibility that the categories will overlap, and gives as an example the metacognitive strategy of planning, which, in as far as planning requires reasoning, might also be considered a cognitive strategy.

As can be seen from above, the LLS classification still overlaps and conflict in opinions and the process of establishing terminology, definitions. Classification systems for language learning strategies are far from straightforward. This study is only based on the classification with the main focus on types of LLS used by the TNU ethnic students. The present study concentrates on LLS with the purpose to examine the relationship between language learning strategies and the TNU ethnic students from the cultural anthropology perspectives.

**1.4. Language Learning Strategy and Individual Language Leaner from Cultural Anthropology Perspectives**

Anthropology is defined as “the study of man, origins, physical characteristics, institutions, religious beliefs, social relationships” (Treuer, 2009, p.2). Treuer divides anthropology into four fields: biological, physical, linguistic, and cultural anthropology. Each field of the four explored a different aspect of human existent and parsed it with tools it developed in the process. In the case of cultural anthropology, which is considered as the field most closely related to language learners, different ethnic working in different parts of the world focused on different perspectives of culture.

According to Bonvillain (2012), the study of cultural anthropology is to encourage students in order to see what is going on in the world and help them understand how it affects cultures. She reported that Japanese students used strategies aimed at precision and accuracy, whereas Hispanic students relied on learning strategies such as predicting, inferring, and working in groups. That is, Japanese students preferred to work alone rather than together in groups, and they based their judgments on reason rather than on personal interactions through group work.

Since learners can vary greatly from each other in their approach to learning, and a multitude of factors may affect the way an individual processes information, issues of individual variability assume considerable importance. Selinker (1972, p.213) is emphatic when he states: “a theory of second language learning that does not provide a central place for individual differences among learners cannot be considered acceptable”. Far from behaving according to some aggregated statistical model, individuals are uniquely engaged in their own infinitely variable world of human activity within the social context to which they belong, and are much more than "a quantified collective" of statistics (Roebuck, 2000, p.82).

From cultural anthropology point of view, we look at the use of LLS with reference to the learner individual factors. The sections that follow are devoted to discussion of the issues of gender, English language proficiency, major field of study; previous language learning experience, type of academic programme, and learning styles.

**1.4.1. Language Learning Strategy and Gender**

Although there are quite a few studies which investigate the relationship between language learning and gender (e.g., Bacon 1992; Boyle, 1987; Burstall, 1975; Eisenstein, 1982; Farhady, 1982; Nyikos, 1990; Sunderland, 1998; Zeylani, 2012; Tam, 2013; Zarei, 2013 and Mashadi & Fallah, 2014), studies which explore LLS use according to gender are not common. Tran (1988) discovered that most studies in this area seem to have reported a greater use of LLSs by women. After studying the language learning strategies used by more than 1,200 undergraduate university students Oxford and Nyikos (1989, p.296) conclude that gender differences had a profound influence: females used strategies more frequently than males, and females used strategies significantly more often than males.

Based on these previous research works, it might be concluded that male and female may use different strategies in learning language and the frequency may be varied. This study aims to examine whether or not the TNU ethnic students’ gender are related to their learning strategy use.

**1.4.2. Language Learning Strategies and English Language Proficiency**

Recent research works show that students who have higher level of language proficiency tend to employ greater range of language learning strategy than those of lower level of proficiency (Green and Oxford 1995; Ghadessy 1998; Intaraprasert 2004; Su 2005; Khalil 2005; Teng 2006; Chang *et al* 2007; Wu 2008; & Anugkakul 2011). Instead of classifying as high and low proficiency levels, some researchers used the terms ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ language learners or ‘good’ or ‘poor’ language learners.

Recently, Kunasaraphan (2015) conducts a research study to identify whether English language learning strategies commonly used by the first year students at International College, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University include six direct and indirect strategies. His study explored whether there was a difference in these students’ use of six direct and indirect English learning strategies between the different levels of their English proficiency. The results of the analysis reveal that English learning strategies commonly used by the first year students include six direct and indirect strategies, including differences in strategy use of the students with different levels of English proficiency.

In the present investigation, the researcher examines the relationship between language learning strategy use and the TNU ethnic students’ levels of proficiency which are classified into high, moderate and low based on the students’ scores gained on the end-of-semester tests.

**1.4.3. Language Learning Strategies and Major Field of Study**

Up to now, research works on major field of study as a factor related to language learning strategy have not been paid much attention, except for the works by Peacock and Ho (2003); Intaraprasert (2003, 2004); Zhang (2005); Alireza and Abdullah (2010); and Minh (2012).

Recently, Minh (2012) conducts a research study to investigate and describe types of language learning strategies which Vietnamese science-oriented university students reported employing in learning the English language and to explore patterns of variations in frequency of students’ reported strategy use according to major fields of study which are classified as science and technology and health science). The research subjects were 645 undergraduate science-oriented students in 6 universities in the north of Vietnam. In learning the English language, science-oriented university students, on a whole, reported medium frequency of strategy use. The findings also reveal that frequency of students’ overall reported use of strategies varied significantly according to their major fields of study and students majoring in Engineering and Technology reported employing more strategies than Health Science students.

The present investigation examines whether or not the TNU ethnic students majoring in Social Sciences and Natural Sciences are related to the use of language learning strategies in learning the English language.

**1.4.4. Language Learning Strategies and Learning Styles**

The term ‘*learning styles*’ has been defined as “cognitive, affective,and physiological traits that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment”. Keefe, (1982, p. 44). In addition, learning styles are the general approaches – for example, global or analytic, auditory or visual – that students use in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subject. These styles are “the overall patterns that give general direction to learning behavior” (Cornett, 1983, p. 9). Claxton and Murrell (1987) analyze learning styles at four levels: personality, information processing, social interaction, and instructional methods. After reviewing the state of the art of research in learning styles, the authors indicated a need for further investigation in a number of areas. They reported that we need to know more about the actual impact on learning when methods used by an instructor are inconsistent with a student's style. Dunn & Griggs (1988, p. 3) affirm that “learning style is the biologically and developmentally imposed set of characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others”.

Although learning styles are not dichotomous (black or white, present or absent), learning styles generally operate on a continuum or on multiple, intersecting continua. For example, a person might be more extroverted than introverted, or more closure-oriented than open, or equally visual and auditory but with lesser kinesthetic and tactile involvement. Few if any people could be classified as having all or nothing in any of these categories (Ehrman, 1996).

It has been stated that people from different cultures and even individuals within the same culture have distinctive learning style patterns (Guild, 1994). Due to different types of learning style, teaching methods which are used by instructors may vary. Some instructors prefer giving lectures at classroom; other may focus more on rules, some use demonstration, while some prefer memorization. As a result, the mismatch between the individual’s learning style and the instructor’s teaching style may lead to failure of learners. In order to address different learning styles, effective teachers use a variety of teaching styles and apply diverse teaching strategies and make effective educational decisions and practices that work best for all students (Guild, 1994; Felder & Silverman,1998; Lawrence, 1993; Oxford, Ehrman, & Lavine, 1991; Schemeck, 1998).

Although a great amount of research has been conducted on learning styles, Wintergerst *et al.,* (2003) argue that not as much research has been documented on non-native speakers and second language learners. In this respect, the present study explores the possible relationships between the TNU ethnic students preferred learning styles and their language learning strategies.

**1.5. Language Learning Strategy Research in Vietnam**

Research works in the field of LLSs in Vietnam mainly focus oninvestigating overall strategy use which students employed in order to help themselves to be successful in achieving the target language (e.g., Huyền, 2004; and Hiền, 2007), some others investigated the choice of strategy use in relation to variables such as, age and gender, level of proficiency (e.g., Khương, 1997; Hoàng, 2008 and Nhan and Lai, 2013).

So far, it can be seen that research work in language learning strategy with Vietnamese students has mainly been carried out with university students, and most of the participants are English major. Students who come from ethnic minorities groups and non-English major have never been examined. In previous research studies, language achievement, age, and gender have been used as the variables relating to students’ use of strategies.

**CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**2.1. Mixed-Methods Research**

The use of both qualitative and quantitative research techniques in a single study constitutes mixed method research. A consensus definition by Johnson et al. (2007) defines the approach as a type of research in which a researcher or a group of researchers combines the elements of qualitative and quantitative approaches in an effort to enhance the breadth and depth of research understanding and collaboration. For example, the use of data collection, quantitative and qualitative viewpoints, and analysis and inference techniques in a single piece of research is an evident use of mixed research methodology

The research takes a personal approach, where the researcher is involved with the participants in the presence of a neutral third party, eliminating the challenges of ambiguity and bias. In addition, the best research method, with corresponding research tools, is the method which better provides an answer to the research questions. In this study the qualitative data was used to compliment the quantitative data. As it will be further explored below, a quantitative approach was more appropriate to answer the research questions 1-3, whereas a qualitative approach was used to find more answers and to have an in-depth look into the relationship between LLS and the ethnicity of TNU students from the cultural anthropology perspectives.

The nature of the research questions often dictates the most appropriate research method to be used. Whereas questions 1 to 3 sought to establish an objective relationship between variables that could be easily measured, the cultural anthropology perspectives which relate to the choice of LLS is some exploratory requirements Consequently, a quantitative approach was more appropriate to answer questions 1 to 3, whereas a qualitative approach was better suited to explore the perspectives of ethnic students at TNU. As such, a mixed method approach needed to be followed in order to answer these questions. Furthermore, some of the questions answered by participants via the (quantitative) LLSQ questionnaire were answered again in the context of a semi-structured (qualitative) interview, thus providing an opportunity for triangulation of data. As a researcher, the need to present original, authentic and unbiased research results was a major factor that led to the adoption of the mixed method approach. In addition, the merits mentioned previously will inevitably clarify and explain any conflicting theories or challenges encountered in the research

**2.2.** **Research Design for the Present Study**

In this study, the researcher, firstly, to examine and determine the relationship between language learning strategies and the ethnicity of the TNU EFL learners from the cultural anthropology perspective (the descriptive purpose) and, secondly, to examine the relationships between the ethnicity and language learning strategy with regards to learner variables (the explanatory purpose).

This survey employed a mixed-method design, involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative part was two questionnaire surveys and the qualitative component was a semi-structured interview

**2.3. Research Participants**

In the first phase of data collection, the participants consisted of 527 ethnic students who were be randomly selected from over 4000 ethnic students at TNU. The students are all native speakers of Vietnamese. They were respondents to the Language Learning Strategy Questionnaire (LLSQ) and the Perceptual Learning-Style Preference Questionnaire (PLPQ). Most of the students are 18-35 years of age and they are from different ethnics, gender, major fields of study, levels of proficiency and learning styles.

In the second phase of data collection 10 students were purposively selected to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted after the LLSQ and LPLQ questionnaire phase of the study completed. The interviewees were purposively selected to be as representative as possible of the learner variables included in the study in terms of ethnics, gender, major fields of study, language proficiency, and learning styles. Although all participants had studied English as subject for at least 3 to 6 years in high school, however, generally speaking, their English is below the average according to their English scores after the first semester final exams.

**2.4 Quantitative data from the two questionnaires**

The quantitative data was collected from ethnic students at Thai Nguyen University. As a first step in the process of data collection, the researcher contacted the directors of the Academic Affairs and Student Affairs Department at TN University of Sciences (TNUS), TN University of Agricultures and Forestry (TUAF), TN University of Information and Communication Technology (ICTU) and TN University of Education (TNUE), explaining the nature and purpose of the study. Permission was granted to conduct the study. The students were notified in advance that they would be completing the two questionnaires on a certain day. Before the questionnaires were administered, the students were given guidelines and instructions for administering the questionnaire.

The ethnic students were fully informed, both verbally and in writing, of the following: their rights, what was required of them, and how the data collected was going to be used and treated in regard to their privacy. The students were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they were not under any obligation to consent to participate. The LLSQ and the LPLQ were administered to all ethnic students in (n=527) during the first week of the semester in academic year 2015-2016. The purpose of the questionnaire is to explore and examine students’ learning strategy uses, the possible patterns of variation between LLS and ethnic students’ gender, major fields of study, and levels of proficiency. After finishing the LLSQ, the ethnic students were asked to complete the PLPQ with the aim to explore the ethnic students preferred learning styles. The two questionnaires took students 1 hour to complete.

The questionnaires were explained to the students in Vietnamese by the researcher in order to ensure that the questionnaires were answered accurately. Students were encouraged to ask the researcher to explain statements or words that they did not understand. The questionnaires were administered anonymously. The students gave neither their names nor their identification numbers: only their ages, gender, major and perceived level of English proficiency were required. They were given numbers to be written on the top of the two questionnaires to make sure that the same person had answered the questions in the two questionnaires. There was no time limit and it took about 25 minutes for students to score all of the items in the two questionnaires. After filling out the questionnaires, the students gave directly to the

researcher. The researcher received around 600 questionnaires, and the responses were analysed,

**2.5. Qualitative data from the semi-structured interview**

The semi-structured interviews were conducted after the researcher finished analyzing data from the two questionnaires. The same procedures were applied to the participants of the interviews, when the preliminary agreement to participate was obtained, the participants were informed later and the researcher made arrangements for each participant to take part in at least one individual interview with the researcher.

When conducting the interview, the researcher kept in mind steps that Bryman and Teevan (2005) suggest when preparing for the interviews. First, the researcher should create a certain amount of order in the topic areas, so that the researcher’s questions flow reasonably well, but the researcher should be prepared to alter the order of questions during the actual interview. Second, the researcher should try to use language that is comprehensible and relevant to the people being interviewed. Third, the researcher should ask or record information of a general kind (name, age, gender, etc.) as well as a specific kind (position, number of years employed, number of years involved in a group, etc.) because such information is useful for contextualizing people’s answers.

The interviews in this study consisted of three main questions (regarding key strategies, learning difficulties and the effects of learner variables) designed to further probe a student’s strategy use and to explore some of the factors which inter-relate with this strategy use as suggested by Griffiths (2003). The interview guide was designed to complement the LLSQ’s quantitative approach by adding a qualitative element in the form of individual opinions, ethnicity, culture background or learning styles. During the interview, the interviewer asked the student the questions on the guide and noted the responses for later summarising.

In addition to providing direct answers to the questions, students were encouraged to elaborate on their answers by providing examples and personal insights, which were also noted by the interviewer.

The 10 ethnic students completed the two questionnaires (LLSQ and PLSQ) and were invited to a semi-structured interview which lasted about twenty minutes, during which time their responses and comments were recorded. Since the students come from four different colleges within Thai Nguyen University, i.e., University of Education, University of Sciences, University of Agriculture and Forestry and University of Technology, each time, the researcher interviewed four individuals. These students were purposively chosen to be as varied as possible in terms of proficiency, field of study, gender and learning styles also in terms of the confidence when talking with strangers or otherwise they achieved during their courses (information obtained from their class teachers and from their English achievement).

During the interview, the LLSQ responses were discussed with the students. They were asked about the strategies they had found most useful and about their development of strategies to deal with the difficulties they had found with learning English. Students were also asked whether they thought their English language proficiency, their gender, field of study or their perceptual learning styles affected their choice of language learning strategies and/or how they felt these factors affected others with whom they learnt. Any other interesting insights were also noted for further analysis.

Interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, were recorded, transcribed and translated into English. Translations were checked by professional translators to ensure validity. Interview questions were structured along the following examples:

1. Which language learning strategies have you found most useful for learning English (key strategies)?

2. (a) What have you found most difficult about learning English?

 (b) Which strategies have you used to help overcome these difficulties?

3. Do you think the strategies you use have been affected by your

(a) ethnicity

(b) gender

(c) age

(d) other factors

If so, what effect have these factors had?

For the purpose of this research, semi-structured interviews were used to gain insights from the students’ statements about their strategy use, and to get their in-depth opinions about how cultural anthropology affected their language learning strategy used.

**2.6 Data Analysis**

The obtained quantitative data were processed with the assistance of some of computer software such as: Microsoft Excel, SPSS and some other specified software.

Descriptive statistics method was used to examine the frequency of strategy use and to compare the degree to which strategies will be reported to be used frequently or infrequently by students in general. There are three levels of strategy use: ‘high use’, ‘medium use’, and ‘low use’ based on the holistic mean scores of frequency of strategy use. In this study, this method was applied to answer Research question 2.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to test the significant differences among the means of two or more groups on a variable to see whether the variation is greater than predicted. The independent variables are usually nominal, and the dependent variable is usual an interval. For the present investigation, this method was used to determine the relationship between the ethnic students’ reported strategy use and 1) gender (male or female), 2) major field of study (social sciences or natural sciences), 3) levels of language proficiency (high, moderate, or low) and 4) learning styles (visual or auditory or tactile or kinesthetic or individual or group).

Qualitative data was transcribed, translated and analyzed by using Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) coding. Coding is the process of developing categories of concepts, and themes emerging from the data in order to group the differences and similarities between the language learning strategies in which students were reported to be used. The goal was to create descriptive, multi-dimensional categories that provide a preliminary framework for analysis

**CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Part A: Results and Discussions of the 2 Questionnaires**

**3.1. Research question 1: What English language learning strategies do the TNU ethnic students employ for their EFL learning?**

To answer research question one, which based on the responses on strategy use on the SILL questionnaire, preliminary descriptive statistics for mean and standard deviation were computed.

The results of the descriptive statistics which were shown in a descending order from most to least used strategy. As can be seen from the table, the mean scores of 50 items in the LLSQ ranging from 1.81 (COG 7: I read for pleasure in English) to 4.22 (MEM 2: I watch English TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English). Since the LLSQ is a 5-point Likert scale, in which 1.00 means “Never or almost never true of me”, 2.00 means “Usually not true of me”, 3.00 means “Somewhat true of me”, 4.00 means “Usually true of me” and 5.00 means “Always or almost always true of me”, the researcher may conclude that 527 ethnic students at TNU used all 50 strategies mentioned in the LLSQ.

**3.2 Research Question 2: What English language learning strategies are frequently used by the TNU ethnic students?**

According to Oxford’s (1990) classification, the range of 3.5-5.0 (mean score) for each of the SILL item is thought to reflect the high level use of the strategy; a mean of all participants in the range of 2.5-3.4 is thought to be in medium use, and 1.0-2.4 belongs to low use.

The mean frequency score of the ethnic students’ reported overall strategy use is 3.20. This means that these 527 ethnic students at Thai Nguyen University, as the whole, reported employing language learning strategies with moderate frequency when they have to deal with language learning.

Regarding frequency of use of strategies in six main categories, result shows the application of all language learning strategies used by ethnic students at Thai Nguyen University. No strategy groups were reported as “never or almost never used”. In other words, 527 ethnic students at TNU used all six categories of learning strategies at a medium level. Basically, the ethnic students actively applied a variety of strategies to facilitate acquiring English. The results also show ethnic students reported using metacognitive strategies more frequently than other strategies and this was followed by compensation strategies, social strategies, memory strategies and affective strategies. Cognitive strategies ranked the lowest. In other EFL studies, too, metacognitive and compensation strategies were found to be among the most highly frequently used strategies and memory strategies, the least frequently used ones, as in Wharton, 2002; Yang,1994; Oh, 1992; and Green, 1991, to name a few.

The results of the repeated measure analysis of variance indicated that the difference among the means of the six strategy categories was significant (*p*<.00). The Bonferroni-corrected paired t-tests showed that the mean for metacognitive (3.42) was significantly higher than the means of all other strategy categories. Similarly, the lowest mean belonging to cognitive strategies (3.04) showed significant difference with the mean of all other strategy groups.

The reason why metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used ones by the TNU ethnic students might be the fact that Vietnam is an EFL context and language learners do not have much exposure to the target language to pick it up unconsciously. In fact, due to the lack of enough exposure to the target language, they hardly have any chance to unconsciously pick up the target language. Through conscious attention to language learning process, they can compensate for this deficiency, and that is why metacognitive strategies were used at such a high level. Furthermore, in most English classes, in schools, university, or even language institutes, a lot of emphasis is put on explaining about the language and making the learners conscious of the process of learning even in cases where the communicative approach is adopted.

Results from the LLSQ reveal 16 strategies that the ethnic students at TNU reported using the most. In these 16 strategies, 3 strategies belong to Memory categories, 2 belongs to Compensation category, Cognitive and Metacognitive category have 4 strategies, 2 strategies belong to Affective category and only one strategy belongs to Social category.

The results of the present study also show cognitive strategies were used at a medium level, however, in terms of individual strategies, a quick review over the four cognitive strategies used very frequently by the participants of this study may explain their high frequently use. In other EFL studies, such as Wharton (2000), Bremner (1999), and Park (1997) cognitive strategies were reported to be among approximately at the middle of the hierarchy of strategy categories. Oxford (1990) suggests that cognitive strategies are essential in learning a new language because they operate directly on incoming information. Besides, O’Malley and Chamot (1990) consider cognitive strategies as the most popular strategies with language learners. Consequently, the ethnic students at TNU may not different from students around the world in terms of using cognitive strategies.

The next frequently used strategy category was memory category. The results are consistent with those of Wharton (2000), and Oh (1992). The participants of the current study reported memory strategies as one of the highest frequently used strategies (MEM 2, MEM 3 and MEM 8), this is consistent with Oxford (1990) when she regarded memory strategies as a powerful tool in language learning. These findings also support the stereotypical description of Asian learners in early studies in which Asian students were reported to prefer strategies involving rote memorization of language rules as apposed to more communicative strategies (e.g., Huang & Naerssen, 1987; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985). These techniques included making a mental picture of the situation in which the word might be used, using rhymes to remember new words, and grouping new words into synonyms, antonyms, nouns, and verbs. Therefore, it is possible that the participants of the study were familiar with these techniques in memory strategies.

These findings, nonetheless, contradict those of similar studies. For instance, Wharton (2000) Chang (1991), Noguchi (1991), Bremner (1999), Wharton (2000), and Peacock and Ho (2003) reported that affective strategies were among the least frequently used strategies. This difference might be due to the difference between the cultural background of the participants of the above-mentioned studies, mostly being Asian students, and the Vietnamese students. That is, although both groups of students studied English in an EFL context and faced, more or less, the same type of problems in learning English, they did not experience the same amount of emotional pressure while using the language (Riazi, 2005). In other words, the high use of affective strategies by TNU ethnic students might imply that they experienced more affective problems, and thus, used more affective strategies.

Indeed, affective strategies enable learners to control their emotions, attitudes, and motivations in language learning processes. Such situations usually occur when the leaner is supposed to give presentations or speak with a native speaker. A likely explanation for the high use of such strategies by the TNU ethnic students is that in language classes they are usually supposed to give lectures and presentations. Giving a presentation in front of a group of classmates creates anxiety in the individual, let alone having to do it in a foreign language over which they do not have enough mastery. That might be the reason why they were so much concerned about and paid a lot of attention to affective factors. (Riazi, 2005). The frequency of the use of individual strategies justifies this explanation.

Social strategies involve interaction with other people (e.g., asking other people to slow down or to repeat what they said or asking for help or clarification), so they are very important in language use. It should be stated that these strategies are usually applicable to the situations where the learners have a lot of opportunity to use the language or have access to the native speakers. This can justify the scant use of these strategies.

Though, TNU ethnic students reported using strategies in social category at the medium level, only one strategy in the category is on the top high use. The less use of this strategy was quite expected as it characterizes contexts where language learners have access to native speakers, not a context like Vietnam in that EFL learners rarely have access to English native speakers. It was quite predictable that the participants of the present study would not report a frequent use of these strategies as compared to other strategies.

**3.3 Research Question 3: To what extent, do the students’ choices of language learning strategies vary significantly with their gender, major fields of study, levels of proficiency and learning styles? If so, what are the main patterns of variation?**

**3.3.1 The relationship between students’ choice of language learning strategies and their gender**

The results revealed that the most popular strategies for both males and females were compensation strategies (M=3.42), and the least popular strategies for both were cognitive strategies (M=3.04). In order to test whether the difference between gender and each category of LLSs was significant, a one-way ANOVA test at the significance level of 0.05 was used to analyze the data. The one-way ANOVA results indicated that there was a significant difference between gender and the memory strategy category (p < .05). No statistically significant differences were found between male and female students in the rest categories of language learning strategies. The results also revealed that females had higher preferences of strategy use than males in three out of six categories of learning strategies (Memory category, Metacognitive category and Affective category) whereas, males had higher preferences than females in two categories (Compensation category and Social category). This finding was inconsistent with most language learning strategies research (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Green & Oxford, 1995; Yang, 1993; Goh & Kwah, 1997; Gu, 2002; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Khamkhien, 2010; Salahshoura, Sharifib, Salahshour, 2013; and Habibollah and Nasser, 2014), which has found significant differences in language learning strategies use by gender. The findings were also different from that obtained by Green and Oxford (1995) in which a significant difference was found in memory, metacognitive, affective, and social groups, but no difference was shown in cognitive and compensation groups. The findings of the present study confirm that gender difference was not one of the variables contributing to the differences in the choices of language learning strategies.

However, the findings of the current study are consistent with previous reports on the same issues. For instance, studies by Green & Oxford (1995); Mochizuki (1999); Oxford & Nyikos (1989); Peacock & Ho (2003) have reported that female learners use learning strategies more frequently than male learners in categories i.e., memory, metacognitive and affective that match with the findings of the present study

 In the present study, memory strategies were used significantly more often by female than male students. This may be due to female students’ higher degree of awareness of their needs and also due to this possible explanation that female students spend more time to engage in their learning analysis and revise the language they have learnt. It also offers valuable insights to language teachers that if female learners are more aware of the review and more prepared and remember to prepare to use learning strategies in learning a new language, then male learners may need more help and attention than female learners in reviewing such capacities in strategy use.

**3.3.2 The relationship between students’ choice of language learning strategies and their major field of study**

The major fields of study of the ethnic students at TNU were classified into two main categories, namely natural sciences and social sciences. The ANOVA was performed to identify any statistically significant variations in strategy use between the respondents of these two natural sciences and social sciences. According to the results of descriptive statistics analysis, the social sciences students seemed to be more commonly in three categories of language learning strategies than did the others. (memory, metacognitive and social categories), whereas, the natural sciences students are more commonly use strategies in the others three (cognitive, compensation and affective categories).

The ANOVA test further investigated the relationships between major differences and the use of language learning strategies, there were significantly different in the use of metacognitive strategies with regard to major differences. It can be concluded that there is a meaningful and significant difference in the metacognitive category of the SILL used by natural sciences and social sciences. This implies that the social sciences students reported using metacognitive strategies to control learning by for example, thinking about their progress in learning English, seeking out ways to improve their learning, setting clear goals in learning English, and planning their schedule to study English.

Therefore, they used the strategies to seek all existing opportunities to practice the language inside and outside classroom setting. By having clearer objectives to improve and acquire the language as well as to prepare them for course-examination purposes, students were more guided to achieve their objectives when they apply metacognitive strategies by planning, organizing and evaluating their own learning.

**3.3.3 The relationship between students’ choice of language learning strategies and their levels of proficiency**

The low proficiency students reported higher frequency use of strategies in memory category. The moderate proficiency students reported higher frequency use of strategies in metacognitive category. Whereas, the high proficiency students reported higher frequency use of strategies in cognitive, compensation, affective and social category.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was further run to investigate the relationships between level of proficiency differences and the use of language learning strategies. Two LLS categories had a significant correlation with the language proficiency of the students, including Cognitive and Social Strategies. Memory, Compensation, Metacognitive and Affective Strategies were not significantly related to students’ language proficiency

Previous language learning strategy studies have consistently established a positive link between language proficiency and strategy use. The results suggested that more proficient learners usually use more strategies than less proficient learners (Radwan, 2011). Examples are Oxford and Nyikos (1989), Intraprasert (2000), Wharton (2000), Griffiths (2003), Wu (2008), Anugkakul (2011), Gerami and Baighlou (2011), and Minh (2012). However, Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) have found a curvilinear relationship between LLS use and language proficiency. Students at the intermediate proficiency level reported more use of strategies than those at the beginning and advanced level. Magogwe and Oliver (2007) have also claimed that language proficiency influences strategy uses at the primary level but not at the secondary or the tertiary level.

Based on the findings of the present investigation, both high and moderate proficiency ethnic students reported more frequent overall strategy use than did the low proficiency counterparts. This is consistent with Wharton’s (2000) study that students with good and fair proficiency use strategies significantly more often than those with poor proficiency. For the COG, COM, AFF and SOC categories, the variation pattern is the same as that of the overall strategy use as above. This is partly consistent with the results of the previous study, which shows the positive variation pattern, that is, the higher proficiency level learners use more strategies than the lower proficiency learners.

One possible explanation for the findings above is the student’s capability of English learning, as Chamot (1987) suggests that effective learners are able to use strategies appropriately, while ineffective learners use a number of strategies as well but inappropriately, and Vann and Abraham (1990) report that unsuccessful language learners appeared to be active strategy users, but sometimes they applied strategies inappropriately. According to Prakongchati (2007), strategy use and learners’ language proficiency are causes and outcomes of each other; active use of some strategies help students attain high proficiency, which in turn makes it likely that students may actively use these strategies. On the other hand, the reason for no significant variation for the high and moderate language proficiency students may be that both of these groups of learners have some capability of language learning, except for the low proficiency learners.

The significant relationship which was discovered between proficiency and reported frequency of language learning strategy uses in the Cognitive and Social categories according to the LLSQ. This finding accords with the results of the research by Green and Oxford (1995). The discovery is encouraging from the point of view of supporting the belief that language learners are “not mere sponges” (Chamot, 1987, p.82), but are capable of taking an effective, active role in their own learning, as suggested by cognitive psychologists such as McLaughlin (1978).

**3.3.4. The relationship between students’ choice of language learning strategies and students’ perceptual learning styles**

In finding the relationship between the ethnic students’ choice of language learning strategies and their perceptual learning styles, One-way ANOVA (analysis of variance) was applied to test whether there was a significant relationship between students’ English learning strategies and learning style preferences, and the significant level was set at *p* < .05. Results of the test reveals the means and standard deviations of the subjects’ overall strategy use by the six learning style preference groups. The mean scores show that the visual learning style students use the fewest strategies, whereas the kinesthetic and group learning style students use the most. However, the difference did not reach significance level, i.e., no significant differences were found among the six learning style groups in overall strategy use. According to “good language learner” studies, good language learners use learning strategies more often and are able to apply the appropriate learning strategies to their own learning style, personality, and the demands of the task. In contrast, the less successful language learners sometimes are not able to match the appropriate strategies with the task during the learning process. In the present study, the results showed that none of the six learning style groups used significantly more strategies than any other group.

The total mean for six language learning strategies reported by six learning style preference groups revealed that compensation strategies were the most popular strategies among ethnic students at TNU. Along with cognitive, metacognitive memory and affective strategies were used with medium frequency. Cognitive strategies were the least popular of all. Of the six learning style preference groups, only Social strategy group reached significant level. Consequently, except strategies in social category, there are no significant differences among the six learning style preference groups in learning strategies use.

All in all, the results showed that learning styles did not have much influence on the learning strategy use. Those results did not support the previous studies. Based on Wen and Johnson’s (1997) statement, they proposed that learning styles would influence the strategy use, but in the present study, the results did not show this conclusion. However, for more detailed discussion, among the six types of learning strategies, there is significant difference existing on social strategy and learning styles. From the findings, the researchers found that learners with auditory learning style use more social strategies than those with visual learning style. According to Celce-Murcia (2001), the main characteristics of visual are those who prefer to have information presented in graphs, maps, plots and illustrations, whereas auditory learners are those who depend on hearing and speaking as a main way of learning. Auditory learners must be able to hear what is being said in order to understand and may have difficulty with instructions that are written. They rely on listening input such as conversation to sort through the information that is sent to them.

In sum, the results of the present study showed that TNU ethnic students were medium strategy users. However, one strategy category, i.e., metacognitive category, was used at a high frequency as the most frequently used strategy category. Memory and cognitive strategies were used as the least frequently used categories by the participants of the study. The results related to strategy category use approximately resemble those of other similar studies conducted with Asian students. However, for one strategy category, the results were different. Unlike most other studies, affective strategies were among the most frequently used strategies. This might be due to the difference between the cultural background and the ethnicity of the students as discussed before.

**Part B: Results and Discussions of the Interview**

Results from the series of semi-structured interview show a considerable amount of research attention has been, and is still being paid to the issues of the impact of cultural anthropology on the LLS use among L2 learners worldwide. This interest is not surprising because students coming from different cultures and who are raised in different environments usually have totally different perceptions about the modes of learning and practicing a foreign language. In addition, they may have different learning traditions and values transferred to them by their parents, which are also highly meaningful for the language learning process in various settings. Consequently, the investigation of the impact of students’ cultural anthropology is an important step in SLA research in general, and research on LLSs in particular.

A close connection between students’ cultural background and LLS use has been researched by many scholars within the past couples of decades, mainly because such researchers as Oxford (1996), Lee (2010), Politzer and McGroarty (1985), O’Malley and Chamot (1990), and others realized the pervasive impact of a person’s authentic local culture on the approaches to studying a foreign language. Oxford (1996), for instance, researched the peculiarities of LLS use practiced by Hispanic students, and clarified that this ethnic category tended to use predicting, inferring and avoiding details techniques more often than other groups of L2 learners did. In addition, Hispanic students preferred to work alone, which was also true for Japanese students in the study by Oxford (1996). North American students were characterized by the researcher as those favouring reflection in the learning process more, and perceiving the L2 process as a more independent process, relying on the teacher’s assistance only partially.

Similar differences in culturally based perceptions of the learning process among students studying a foreign language were noted by Lee (2010), Politzer and McGroarty (1985), O’Malley and Chamot (1990), Foster (2012), Deneme (2010), Rao (2006), and other researchers. Both the teacher and his/her students are affected by their cultural backgrounds, so the learning process often becomes a very culturally specific phenomenon. Such peculiarities have to be understood well by all participants of the L2 learning process, and students should be aware of the impact that their culture has on their learning process. Such awareness and the conscious adaptation of a certain flexibility in LLS selection are likely to provide a strong contribution to the progress of the L2 learning. Therefore, a portion of this research was aimed at identifying the students’ personal opinions about the nature of the impact their ethnic culture has on their L2 learning process. Such evidence may serve as a valuable addition to the objective research findings, since it will exemplify the subjective, individual accounts of students regarding their own cultural experiences related to SLA, which may help both researchers and teachers to shape L2 learning processes and tasks in correspondence with the needs of learners representing certain cultures.

Since the present study undertook analysis of the impact of cultural anthropology of students on their LLS use and selection, it is essential to turn attention to the overall perception regarding English language learning shaped by the Arabic culture. To engage with this issue, the researcher conducted a qualitative portion of research that showed that students were mostly skeptical regarding the impact of their ethnic minority culture on L2 learning, and did not see any immediate connections and impact between those two aspects. However, some interviewees saw the source of strong ethical and moral values in their culture when they learn a foreign language.

In conclusion, after the interviews, the researcher found some factors which affect the choice of language learning strategy use as follows:

*Level of language proficiency*

The interviewed ethnic students at TNU believed that English language proficiency might be related to their language learning strategy use. The students who have higher ability had similar beliefs and some believed that they had higher language proficiency than other classmates, so that learning with others might not help them much. On the other hand, students who have lower language ability tend to have stronger preference for group learning and dependent learning. Many of them pointed out that learning with others can enhance their language proficiency by learning from the strengths from others. The lower language ability students also affirmed that they preferred to have more teachers' guidance as they lacked confidence in learning and acquiring English. Based on the interview findings, English language proficiency seems to be an important factor contributing to students' selection of language learning strategies. Higher ability students have stronger preference towards independent learning and individual learning, while weaker students seem to prefer dependent learning and group learning due to their lower level of language proficiency.

In addition, the findings from the interviews also show that students may have different levels of preference for group learning according to the nature of learning tasks. Many higher ability students generally have a higher preference for group learning for learning activities which do not involve assessments. On the other hand, they do not prefer to have group assessment since they do not want poorer students rely on their work.

Many of the interviewed students preferred to work individually as they believed they could ensure the best quality of work. They found difficult to work with students who had poor learning attitudes and limited English language proficiency as they did not want to spend extra time to help them finish their work.

*Loosing faces*

Ethnic students said they did not want to show their weaknesses in front of class and therefore had a stronger preference for individual learning. They were afraid that they may lose face if they make a mistake in front of the class. With the ethnic students’ culture, face means personal esteem, prestige and reputation. Therefore, even if they don’t understand the concepts in class, they won’t ask their teachers in class. It looks stupid if they raise a question which everyone knows the answer. That’s also the reason why almost all ethnic students are very closed when they learn a foreign language.

*Major field of study*

The interviewed ethnic students said that the ways of acquiring knowledge in other subjects might influence their choice of language learning strategy. For example, they believed that studying Natural Sciences helped them develop a higher preference for analytical and independent learning strategy, whereas, the Social Sciences tend to choose strategies which are for the explanation and confirmation.

*Learning environment and learning approaches of students at their secondary schools.*

The interviewed students suggested that the schools they attended might have great influence on them. Some students interviewed had studied in at high school in cities where they have foreign teachers, while some had studied in mountainous area schools where are very limited to foreign language learning environment. They said learning in different schools caused them to use difference strategy to learn the language and develop different learning style preferences.

*Learning styles from secondary teachers’ teaching styles*

Some interviewed students said the teaching styles of their former English teachers had a very significant influence on their learning style preferences. They believed that their learning style preferences may be developed from their former teachers’ teaching styles. For example, some students said their former English teachers adopted a relaxed approach which gave them much freedom in choosing the most appropriate learning approach, such as learning through reading newspapers or doing language exercises in class. Because of this kind of teaching style, many students started to develop independent learning and analytical learning.

On the other hand, some students said that their former teachers adopted a teacher-centered approach in English lessons. Their teachers provided them with lots of handouts and spent much time lecturing. Some students mentioned that they were given lots of vocabulary lists and were required to memorize them. They said they relied much on teachers' explanations and did not have training on language analysis.

In addition, in the place where the ethnic students had studied before, teachers have a very important role in students’ learning, and even in their whole life. Moreover, teachers are expected to be good role models academically and morally because students may imitate their teachers’ behavior and even their way of thinking. Students may be nurtured to have certain learning style preferences which may be similar to their teachers’

**PART III: CONCLUSION**

**1. Summary of Research Findings**

There has been considerable research on language learning strategies, investigating a range of learner groups in both English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The results of these studies have successfully contributed to the understanding of the nature, categories and patterns of strategy use in general, as well as their use in acquiring different language skills. Although extensive research around the world has been carried out on the use of language learning strategies for improving language skills, far too little attention has been paid to the language learning strategies used by ethnic students in Vietnam in general and in Thai Nguyen University in particular. This has indicated a need to understand and explore the language learning strategies that existed among this group of EFL learners.

The ethnic students at TNU used all 50 strategies mentioned in the LLSQ and they reported employing these language learning strategies with moderate frequency when they have to deal with language learning. In terms of using strategies in six categories in the LLSQ, ethnic students reported using metacognitive strategies more frequently than other strategies, and this was followed by compensation strategies, social strategies, memory strategies and affective strategies. Cognitive strategies were used the least frequently.

With respect to the impact of gender on LSS use, the results revealed that the most popular strategies for both males and females were compensation strategies, and the least popular strategies for both were cognitive strategies. Results of this study indicated that there was a significant difference between gender and the memory strategy category and no statistically significant differences were found between male and female students in the rest categories of language learning strategies. Female students used memory strategies significantly more often were than male students.

Regarding major field of study, the social sciences students seemed to be more commonly in three categories of language learning strategies than did the others. (memory, metacognitive and social categories), whereas, the natural sciences students are more commonly use strategies in the others three (cognitive, compensation and affective categories). Besides, there is a meaningful and significant difference in the metacognitive category of the SILL used by natural sciences and social sciences.

In terms of level of language proficiency, the low proficiency students reported higher frequency use of strategies in memory category. The moderate proficiency students reported higher frequency use of strategies in metacognitive category. Whereas, the high proficiency students reported higher frequency use of strategies in cognitive, compensation, affective and social category. Two LLS categories had a significant correlation with the language proficiency of the students, including Cognitive and Social Strategies. Memory, Compensation, Metacognitive and Affective Strategies were not significantly related to students’ language proficiency.

With respect to the relationship of learning styles on LSS use, the visual learning style students use the fewest strategies, whereas the kinesthetic and group learning style students use the most. However, the difference did not reach significance level, i.e., no significant differences were found among the six learning style groups in overall strategy use. Further analysis revealed that compensation strategies were the most popular strategies among ethnic students at TNU. Along with cognitive, metacognitive memory and affective strategies were used with medium frequency. Cognitive strategies were the least popular of all. Of the six learning style preference groups, only Social strategy group reached significant level (p < .05). Consequently, except strategies in social category, there are no significant differences among the six learning style preference groups in learning strategies use.

The underlying purpose of this study was to answer was whether cultural anthropology perception of ethnic students may impact on language learning strategy use of EFL learners in at Thai Nguyen University. As has been observed in the section above, the impact of culture is complex and nuanced. The present study is in line with existing research insofar as metacognitive LSS strategies were preferred by the learners who undertook the LLSQ questionnaire. However, given that it is not possible to control for the “cultural anthropology” variable, such results must be considered with caution. In addition, the qualitative data collected for this study indicate that culture, language proficiency, major field of study, losing faces, learning environment and experiences and learning styles form secondary teachers’ teaching styles have an impact on the participants’ choice of LLS to learn English as a foreign language.

The results from the interview also provided a number of additional insights into how the teaching of English might be improved in Thai Nguyen, based on their own experiences. Overwhelmingly, participants believed that it was important for English to be taught in school from an earlier age and that the focus should be on learning to communicate in English, rather than memorizing grammar rules. In addition, it also emerged from this data that there may be a need to extend the time which is dedicated to English teaching, as well as to train teachers to deliver more interactive classes, use visual aids and technology.

**2. Limitations of the Study**

This study had some limitations which should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. First, all of the participants of the study were ethnic students from Thai Nguyen University only. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings to other ethnic populations. It should be noted that in this study, the number of participants was limited to those who participated in the study. Thus, the generalization of the findings to a larger population with different native languages or cultural backgrounds may be limited. However, for the purpose of instructional implications, it is possible to apply some of the results to similar contexts.

Second, the data were collected through a self-reporting instrument which may reflect personal perceptions rather than students’ actual use of learning strategies. Future research into language learning strategies may benefit from other data collection procedures, including verbal protocols and observation, in addition to self-reporting questionnaires.

Apart from these limitations, the overall findings of this study are consistent with studies carried out in other contexts, showing that students tend to stick to language learning strategies in the process of their language learning in university programs. Therefore, it is plausible to consider of language learning strategies as being a prominent learner variable to be considered, both theoretically and pedagogically.

**3. Implications and Recommendations of the Study**

In the field of LLS research, there has been much effort taken and considerable research done to analyse the correlation between the use of LLS and the improvement of learners’ language skills. For instance, Oxford (1990) developed the strategy inventory for language learning comprising six main types of language learning and fifty learning techniques in general. However, none of the work of international scholars has raised the question of variables affecting the SILL use in the context of learning English in a Vietnamese speaking country.

The concept of cultural background is a fundamental one when learning a second language, and an educator’s lack of awareness of the learner’s culture may confuse a student, since language advancement depends on the teacher’s individual approach to developing efficient and competent learning programs for students (Ansari, 2012). The contemporary practice of teaching EFL to Vietnamese learners and utilizing LLS ignores peculiarities of the ethnic minority people culture entirely.

The major contribution of this work to EFL learning within the Vietnamese-speaking environment is the indication that learner’s culture may impact the process to acquire English skills. All participants who took part in the present study are ethnic students studying at Thai Nguyen university whose native tongue is (considered to be) Vietnamese. The research findings indicated that ethnic students use the entire scope of LLSs. Metacognitive strategies appeared to be the most popular, though their utilization rate depends on the proficiency level of the learner. The study also revealed that low-level learners are more likely to exercise memory strategies while being introduced to new vocabulary. Cognitive, compensation and social strategies are applied by ethnic students to a medium extent.

These findings contribute to the study of the field of EFL learning within the Vietnamese-speaking environment and ethnic students in mountainous areas in terms of the use of LLS. Metacognitive strategies may be considered to be of the highest concern for scholars and researchers while developing curriculum and educational programs. Moreover, this study has narrowed the subject of EFL learning by ethnic students at TNU and their use of LLS. Further investigations could be undertaken on the basis of the received results to focus on analysing the sub-scale scores of the use of metacognitive strategies while learning English by ethnic students. The current research identified the interrelationship between the use of LLS and language proficiency level and the use of LLS and learner’s gender, major field of study, level of proficiency and learning styles. For example, the higher proficiency level provokes more frequent use of learning strategies; moreover, it encourages the exercise of more sophisticated strategy types, notably metacognitive strategies.

In addition, the findings of the present study suggest a number of implications for teachers’ EFL instruction at universities in which the study was conducted. The finding of a medium level of overall mean of strategy use in the current study suggests that the ethnic students at the university may not be aware of the available strategies at their disposal, and hence were not applying the full range of appropriate strategies. Therefore, it is important for English teachers at TNU to raise students’ awareness of the broad range of strategy options available to them. The resulting awareness and expansion of strategy use may improve students’ motivation, and thus help them to become more self-confident and successful language learners. It is also important to encourage students to find their own ways of overcoming the constraints of language learning and use in their learning environment. These ways may include making efforts to find and communicate with native speakers online, participating in English mailing lists on topics of interest to students, and other similar activities.

**RESEARCHER’S ARTICLES RELATED TO THE THESIS**

1. Dung, L. Q. (2017). The Relationship between Language Learning Strategies and Learning Styles of Ethnic students at Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, 2017*, Volume 7, Issue 8. <http://www.ijsrp.org>.
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