

A Quantitative Investigation into English Learners' Language Learning Strategies in an English-Medium Mainland-Hong Kong Cooperative University in China

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Abstract

As English-medium cooperative universities emerge in China, students' English learning strategies, which have long been documented as an important factor in their academic success, have gained increasing attention in second language acquisition. This study investigated students' English learning strategies in an English-medium cooperative university in China. Drawing on data collected using Oxford (1989)'s language learning strategy survey from Year-1 (N = 339) and Year-2 students (N = 207), an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. It suggested three main English learning strategies, including cognitive, metacognitive, and compensatory/evaluative/affective strategies. A 2 (study years) \times 3 (strategies) ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of study years and that of strategies as well as a significant interaction effect. A structural equation model (SEM) indicated that students' use of language learning strategies served as a significant mediator between their English learning history and their self-rated English proficiency. The pedagogical implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: English learning strategies, English-medium cooperative universities, English as a foreign or second language

Introduction

A learning strategy is defined as a set of learning methods and techniques that learners apply in order to achieve their expected learning outcomes (Tai & Tang, 2021; Zha & Liu, 2023). For language learners, a set of learning strategies especially refers to systematic learning methods that they adopt for attaining a certain level of language proficiency. In the field of second and foreign language acquisition, language learning strategies have long been a well-researched topic in light of a fast-growing population of bilingual and multilingual users, second and third language learners, and in the context of international cultural and scholarly communication (Tai & Tang, 2021; Zha & Liu, 2023). As the world is becoming an increasingly culturally diverse community and as ever greater importance is being attached to language learning, language learning strategies have attracted increasing attention from scholars and researchers from the interdisciplinary fields of linguistics, educational pedagogy, and other highly relevant areas (Habok et al., 2022; Tai & Tang, 2021; Zha & Liu, 2023). Considering its important position in educational psychology, the role of language learning strategies in the process of learning

English by learners who are non-native English speakers has become important for research, especially in English-medium educational institutions, the number of which has been increasing in recent years.

English-medium instruction (EMI) or English-as-a-medium-of-instruction education indicates a means of teaching and learning using English as the main instructional language (Galloway & Ruegg, 2022). It happens in various situations, including international students learning in an English-speaking country (inner circle), institutions in a country where English is used officially as a second language or a Lingua Franca (outer circle), and institutions in a country where English does not have a formal or official status (expanding circle). EMI in a country of the expanding circle imposes challenges to both teachers and learners for various reasons, such as students' lack of English proficiency, a shortage of effective English support, a deficiency in English-speaking environment, and so forth (Galloway & Ruegg, 2022; Zhou et al., 2021). Since language learning strategies play a crucial role in students' learning of English, understanding how students of English-medium institutions in an expanding circle country appears to be of great importance and necessity.