

Influence of Learning Strategies in The Learning of ESL

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Abstract

Learning strategies are crucial in the learning process as these strategies lead to better learning experience in general, and thus lead to positive outcome and achievement. Understanding the preferred and practical learning strategies is fundamental for the learners to optimally strategize their overall approach on their studies. This quantitative study aims to investigate the perceived use of cognitive components, metacognitive self-regulation, and use of resource management in language learning. A purposive sample of 115 participants among undergraduates students in a Malaysian higher education institution responded to the online survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey with 4 sections, specifically on demographic profile, cognitive components, metacognitive self-regulation and resource management respectively. The findings of this present study revealed that all types of strategies were highly used by the students, with resource management reported as the most frequent strategy learners depended on. Therefore, it is suggested that both learners and educators make use of the highlighted strategies to design and plan the academic activities and assessments, and specifically take these elements into account in establishing effective learning motivation. Future research could focus on the relationship of learning strategies and the aspect of digitalisation in education and the relevant tools.

Keywords: Learning Strategies, Language Learning, Resource Management Strategies

Introduction

Background of Study

Learning strategies are referred to as behaviours which could help learners to comprehend (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable (Oxford, 1990; Hall, 2001). Motivation is essential in learning as it allows learners to maintain their focus, and subsequently succeed academically. This has recently become a widely discussed matter due to the unexpected emergence of remote teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the challenges it poses (Saleh et.al., 2023). As the learning of language is concerned, the strategies applied by the learners during the process enhance their language proficiency and boost their confidence when using the language (Rusnadi, 2017). Language learning can be both motivating and challenging for the learners due to various internal and external factors (Dörnyei, 2020; Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). Classroom environment is highlighted as a key motivating factor for language learning (Dörnyei & Muir, 2019). Albiladi & Alshareef (2019) in their review of literature regarding blended learning highlight that the learners usually show positive perceptions and attitudes toward the use of blended learning as an English teaching approach. However, it is also suggested that the same design can demotivate the learners, especially if there is lack of support for technological aspects as well as pedagogical and instructional teaching. While types of materials incorporated into language learning can be motivation for some learners and lead to better language mastery (Atmowardoyo & Sakkir, 2021), some others find that it can be challenging and demotivating due to the unconventional nature of the materials (Wijaya et.al., 2021). Meanwhile, the incorporation of new technology in language learning is perceived to be more motivating for learners (Sun & Gao, 2020), but can be challenging due to some aspects such as the features and functions, distractions, and addictive nature of smart devices (Kaceti & Klímová, 2019). Cultural dimensions play an important role in motivating the language learners, and they are more motivated when they can relate the language learned with their culture (Peng & Patterson, 2022), but less motivated when there is a lack of relationship and relevance between the two aspects (Alshammari, 2020).

In the beginning, Rigney (1978) defined language learning strategies as the often-conscious steps used by learners or their behaviours in the attempt to enhance not only acquisition but also retention, recall, storage and the use of newly acquired information (Hardan, 2013). Subsequently, Oxford (1990, p.8) refined the definition of LLS as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations." Her take on LLS has been widely used by researchers until recent years with the emphasis on the two types of strategies; direct and indirect. Memory, cognitive and compensation strategies are in the direct category while the indirect strategies consist of metacognitive, affective and social strategies (Oxford, 1990). The more recent view of LLS portrays it as derivative of motivation to learn language and the actions taken by learners are both deliberate as well as conscious (Woods, 2020). In order to be successful learners, they do not simply incorporate strategies but they do it consciously in a way that maximizes the outcomes (Wood, 2020). This view enriches the description of LLS by the founding researchers.

Throughout the years, LLS theory has been massively tested, applied, and reviewed. One study by Almusharraf and Bailey (2021) predicts that the trend will remain consistent and the theory stays relevant despite the idiosyncratic and ever-changing learning environments. In addition to that, they believe that the LLS learners are instructed to use are influenced by

curriculum design which means that incorporation of technology affects the strategies utilized. According to Almusharraf and Bailey (2021), online activities like uploading language tasks, watching related videos, taking online sessions and engaging in online chats call for different cognitive and behavioural demands which then influence the strategies used.

Statement of Problem

Some researchers showed their interest in specific language learning strategies practised for specific language skills. As in John, Rangasamy, Indiran, Adickalam, Kashinathan and Hashim (2021) specifically studied language learning skills mostly utilised by ESL learners in improving their speaking skills. In the meantime, Pramesti and Susanto (2023) explored language learning through social learning strategies among vocational students. However, as the world of education has shifted to online distance learning, Bunghanoy, and Sumalinog (2023) conducted a study on varied language learning strategies employed by students who attended English online classes.

In exploring language learning strategies, Yu, Xu and Sukjairungwattana (2023) suggested including interdisciplinary cooperative learning as one of the underlying mechanisms. Other than that, findings from Yidan, Mungthaisong and Santhi (2023) recommended that inviting language learners from different majors and institutions would yield a more comprehensive understanding of language learning strategies. Furthermore, researchers should explore language learning strategies by also taking into consideration the internal and external factors involved in both classroom and outside classroom learning sessions (Mia, 2023)

Two main types of research gap supports this study. The first is the knowledge gap. The study by Wang (2020) pointed out that there exists a lack of knowledge in the field of language learning strategies. The study pointed out specifically a need to research on English learning strategies among foreign learners. Next is practical gaps. The study by Sukying (2021) concluded that additional research is needed to explore learners' selection of specific strategies to learn a language.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore perception of learners on their use of learning strategies. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- How do learners perceive the use of cognitive components in language learning?
- How do learners perceive metacognitive self-regulation in language learning?
- How do learners perceive the use of resource management in language learning?
- How do the means differ across all three learning components in language learning?

Literature Review

Strategies in Learning Language

A very well-known model in language learning by O'Malley and Chamot was developed in 1990 and divided into a classification of language learning strategies on their research namely; cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio-affective strategies. Based on their opinion, cognitive strategies involve mental processes such as using mnemonic devices, organising information, taking notes, summarising and analysing the language. Meta-cognitive strategies engage awareness and control of one's own learning process, for example, when setting up goals, self-assessment, monitoring progress, as well as, seeking opportunities for language practice. Other prominent strategies primarily involve the social and emotional aspects of

language learning, such as seeking support from others, joining language exchange programs, participating in group activities and managing anxiety. These strategies are not mutually used in isolation and can be used in combination as each category includes several specific strategies that learners can utilise to enhance their language learning experience.

Oxford (1990) also developed a classification of language learning strategies and her taxonomy includes six main groups; cognitive, memory, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective, and social. In relation to cognitive strategies, these techniques involve mental processes in analysing, reasoning and dealing with problem-solving which include using contextual clues, making predictions and summarising. In her opinion, memory strategies involve techniques for improving memory and retention, such as, using repetition, visualisation and association. According to Oxford (1990), compensation strategies, such as, paraphrasing, using gestures and synonyms are strategies that involve finding alternative ways to communicate especially when learners are lacking specific vocabulary or grammar knowledge. Meta-cognitive strategies involve self-awareness and self-regulation of the learning process, for example, like planning, setting goals and reflecting on one's learning. Oxford recommends that affective strategies usually involve managing emotions and attitudes towards language learning which sometimes incorporate ways in managing anxiety, building motivation and creating a positive learning environment. As Oxford (1990) put it, "asking for help, seeking opportunities for conversation and participating in language exchange activities are social strategies which involve interacting with others to improve language learning skills". Oxford's classification of language learning strategies has been influential in informing language teaching and learning practices, as it helps learners become more conscious of the strategies they use and empowers them to make informed decisions about their language learning experiences.

It is worth noting that both O'Malley and Oxford's classifications provide valuable insights into the various strategies that language learners can use and the categories are often overlapped as these strategies can be mixed and matched based on learners' individual learning preferences and needs.

Past Studies on Language Learning Strategies

Habok and Magyar (2018) conducted a study on language learning strategies (LLS) used by lower secondary school (years 5 and 8) students. The study explored the connection between LLS and foreign language attitude, proficiency and general school achievement. 868 students participated in the study. The instrument used an adapted version of strategies inventory for language learning questionnaires. Findings showed that students mainly engaged in metacognitive strategies in both years. Findings also found differences between more and less proficient language learners' strategy use. The findings also found that students in year 5 mainly used metacognitive, social and memory strategies. Year 8 students used more metacognitive strategies and less memory strategies. It was also found that the use of metacognitive strategies influenced foreign language marks.

Next the study by Sukying (2021) investigated LLS used by Thai English as a foreign language (EFL) students. The instrument is a questionnaire based on Oxford's (1990) taxonomy. The study also looked at the difference in LLS used across clusters of academic study. 1,523 students participated in this study. Findings revealed that university students were reported to use LLS. The findings showed that the most frequently used was affective strategies. This is followed by cognitive, social and memory strategies. Findings also showed that there is a relationship of LLS use across clusters.

Conceptual Framework

Language learning is a complex process. Some learners need to use learning strategies. Some need to be taught the learning process; while some need a boost from the environment. Nevertheless, with reference to figure 1, some need a combination of strategies, process and also their surrounding environment to maximise learning (Rahmat, 2018). In addition to that, according to Laiet.al (2022) university students use strategies such as cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social to facilitate their learning process. With reference to figure 1, for language learning, some strategies may help or hinder learning depending on (i) the type of language, or even (ii) the condition of the learners. Next, the choice of learning process determines how fast the learning can take place. Finally, the environment influences the learners as well as learning success.

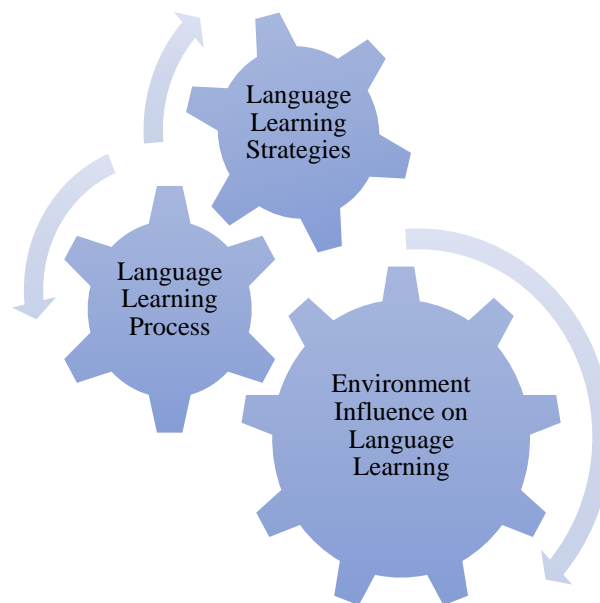


Figure 1- Factors that Influence Learning a Language

Since language learning begins with what strategies learners use, this study is done to explore how learners perceive their use of strategies in language learning. Figure 2 shows the conceptual framework of the study. According to Wende and Rubin (1987), language learning strategies include (a) cognitive components, (b) metacognitive self-regulation and also (c) resource management. To begin with, cognitive components involve the use of (i)rehearsal, (ii) organisation, (iii) elaboration, (iv) critical thinking. Resource management involves (i) environment management, (ii) effort management and (iii) help-seeking.

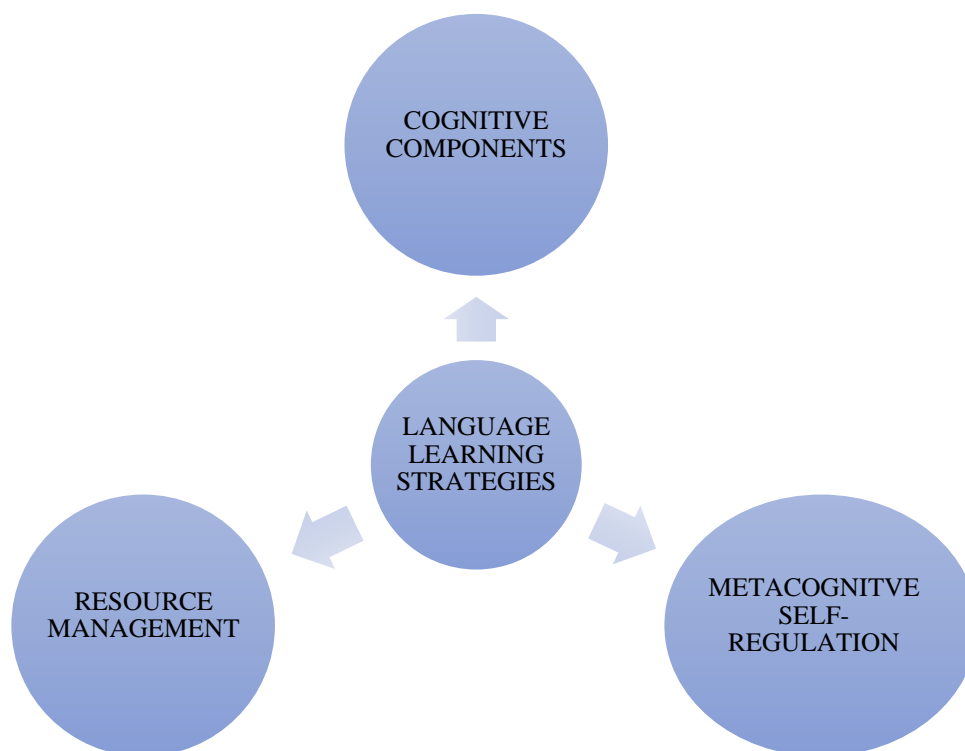


Figure 2- Conceptual Framework of the Study- Language learning Strategies

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation factors for learning among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 115 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Wenden and Rubin (1987) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 4 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 19 items on cognitive components. Section C has 11 items on metacognitive self-regulation and section D has 11 items on resource management.

Table 1

Distribution of Items in the Survey

	STRATEGY (Wenden and Rubin, 1987)		SUB-STRATEGY		
A	COGNITIVE COMPONENTS	(a)	Rehearsal	4	19
		(b)	Organization	4	
		(c)	Elaboration	6	
		(d)	Critical Thinking	5	
B	METACOGNITIVE SELF-REGULATION				11
C	RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	(a)	Environment Management	5	11
		(b)	Effort Management	4	
		(c)	Help-Seeking	2	
					41

Table 2
Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.955	41

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .955, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Q1. Gender

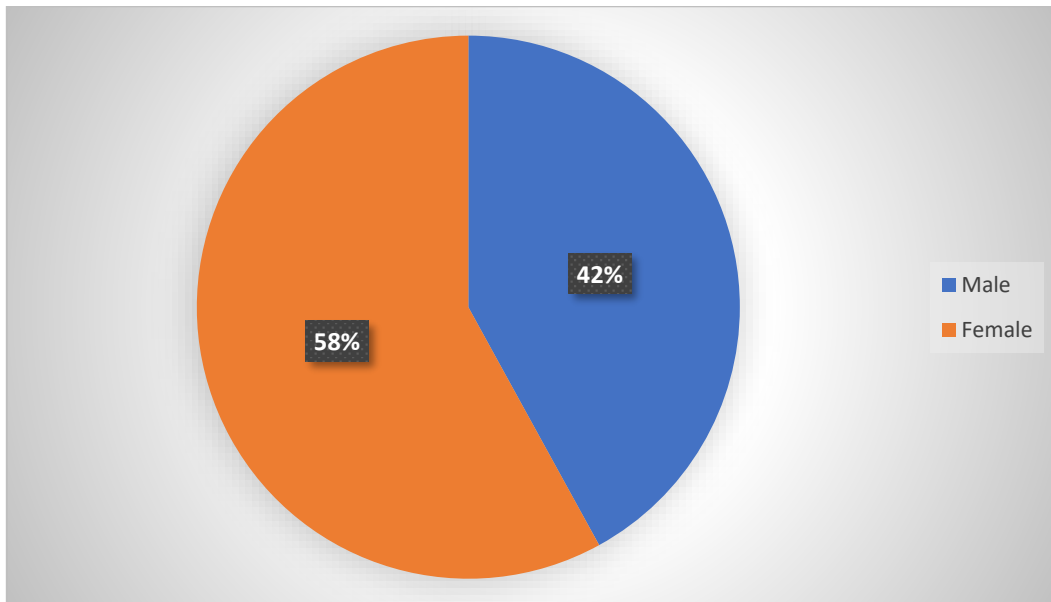


Figure 3- Percentage for Gender

Figure 3 shows the percentage of gender. 42% are male while 58% are female respondents.

Q2 Discipline

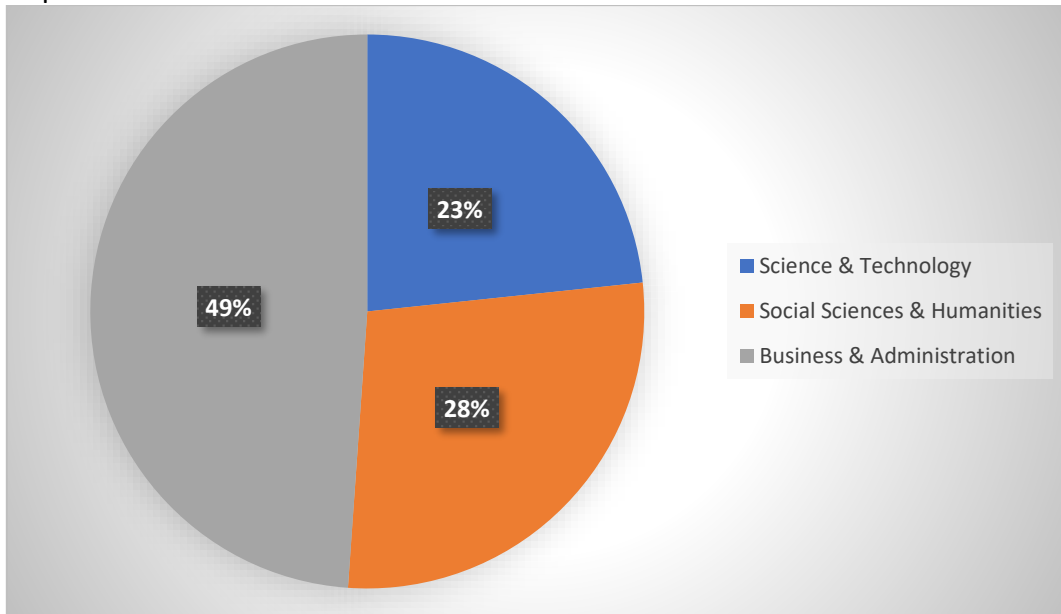


Figure 4- Percentage for Discipline

Figure 4 shows the percentage for discipline. 23% are from science and technology. Next, 28% are from social sciences and humanities while 49% are from business and administration cluster.

Q3 Mode of Studies

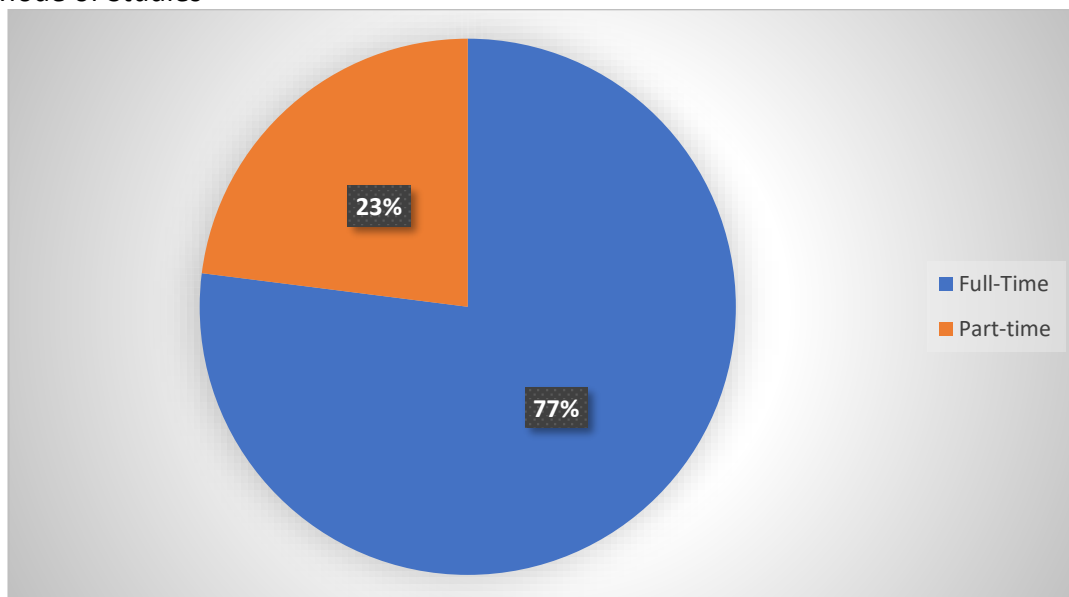


Figure 5- Percentage for Mode of Studies

Figure 5 shows the percentage for model of studies. 77 % are studying full-time. Next, 23% of the respondents are studying part-time.

Q4 Level of Studies

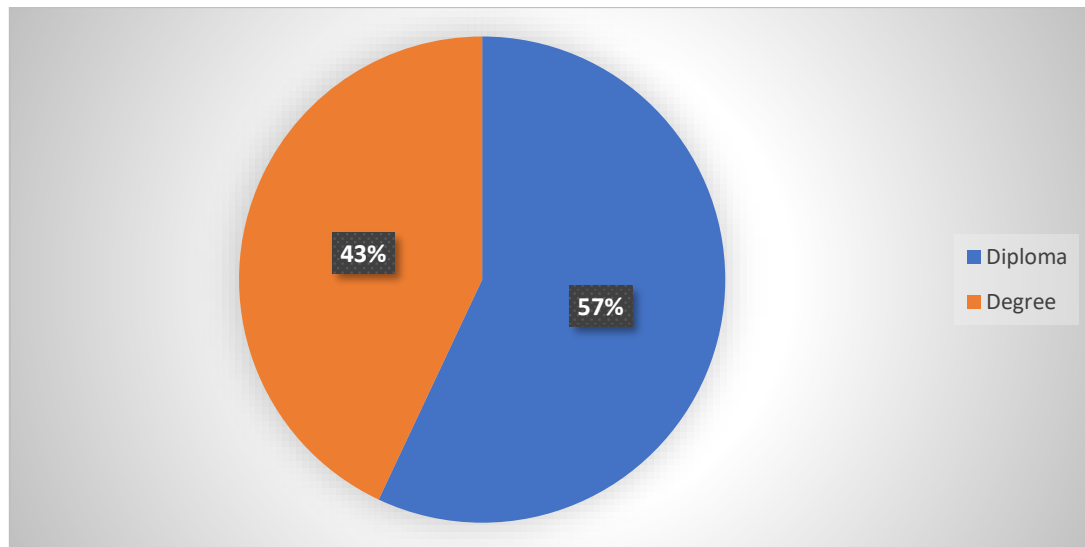


Figure 6- Percentage for Level of Studies

Figure 6 shows the percentage for level of studies. 57% of the respondents are studying at diploma level Next, 43% are doing their degree.

Findings for Cognitive Components

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive the use of cognitive components in language learning?

Cognitive Components (19 items)

(a) Rehearsal (4 items)

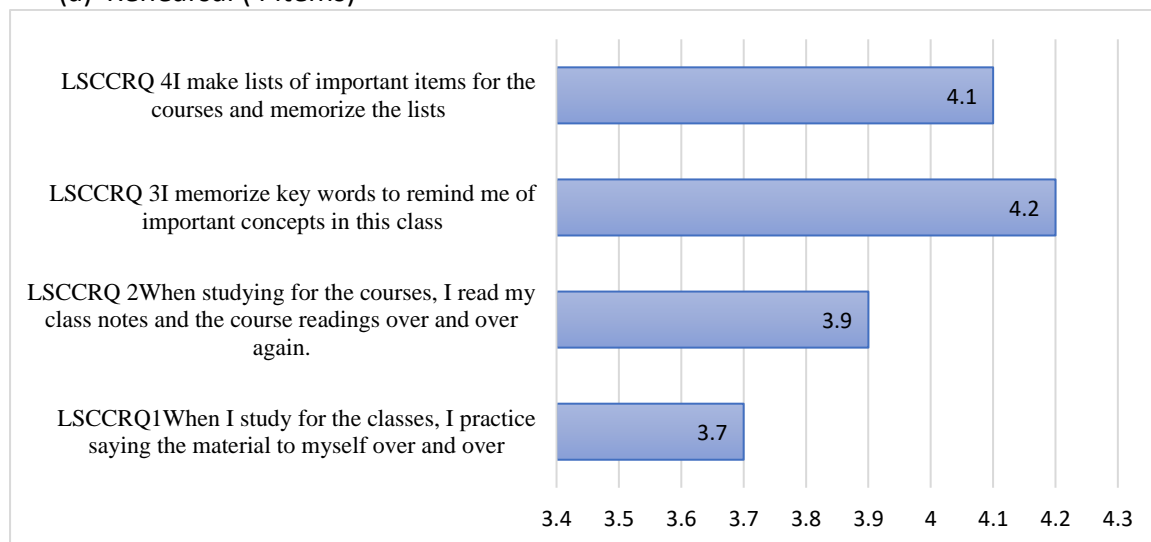


Figure 7- Mean for Rehearsal

Figure 7 shows the mean for rehearsal. The highest mean is 4.2 for the item “LSCCRQ 3I memorize key words to remind me of important concepts in this class”. Next The item “LSCCRQ 4I make lists of important items for the courses and memorize the lists” reported a

mean of 4.1. The lowest mean is 3.7 for “LSCCRQ1When I study for the classes, I practice saying the material to myself over and over”.

(b) Organization (4 items)

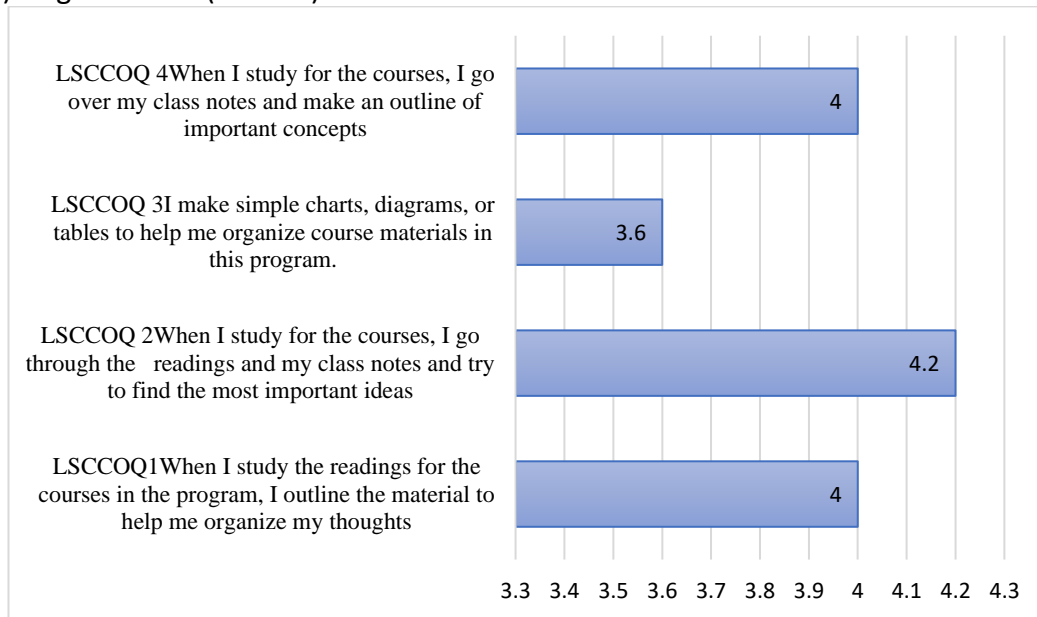


Figure 8- Mean for Organization

Figure 8 shows the mean for organization. The highest mean is 4.2 for the item “LSCCOQ 2When I study for the courses, I go through the readings and my class notes and try to find the most important ideas”. Next, two items share the same mean of 4 and they are “LSCCOQ1When I study the readings for the courses in the program, I outline the material to help me organize my thoughts” and “LSCCOQ 4When I study for the courses, I go over my class notes and make an outline of important concepts”.

(c) Elaboration (6 items)

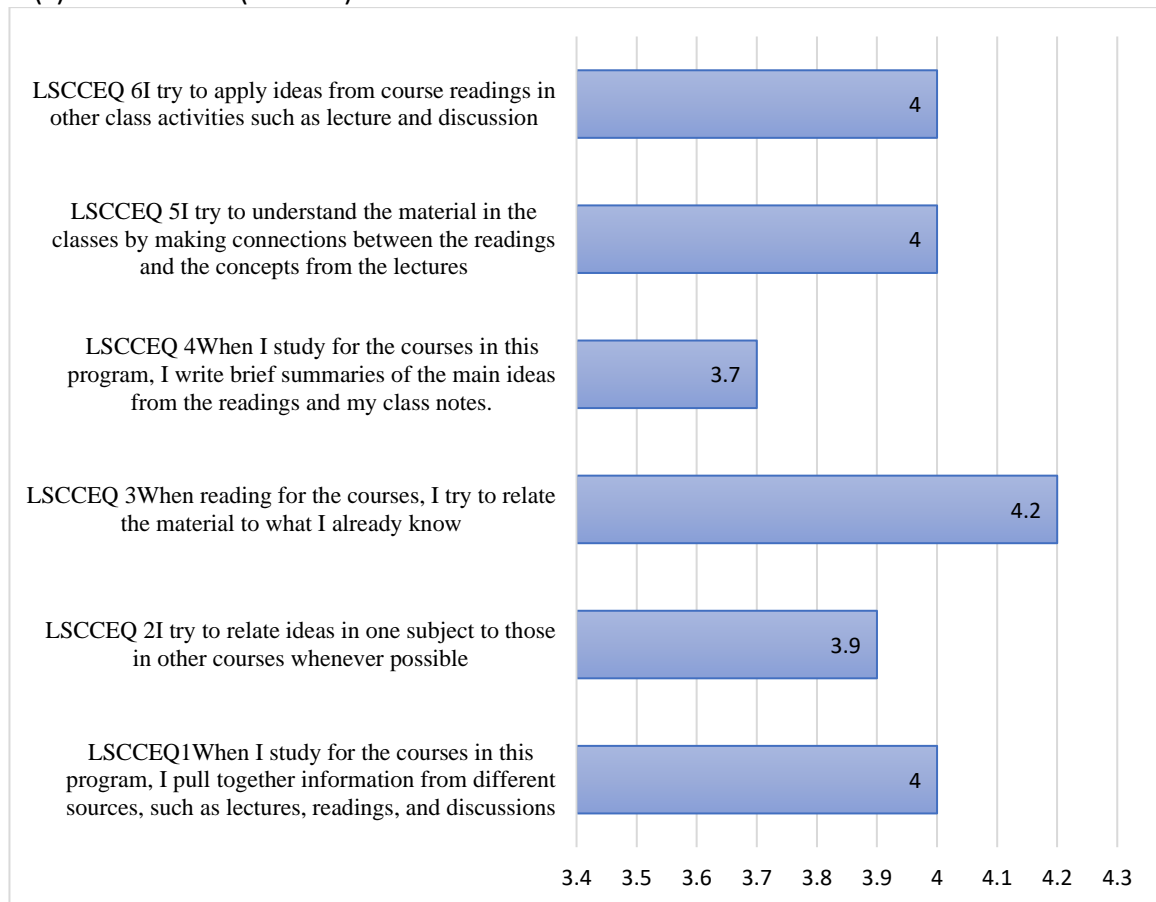


Figure 9- Mean for Elaboration

Figure 9 shows the mean for elaboration. The highest mean is 4.2 for the item “LSCCEQ 3When reading for the courses, I try to relate the material to what I already know”. Next, Three items share the same mean of 4 and they are “LSCCEQ 1When I study for the courses in this program, I pull together information from different sources, such as lectures, readings, and discussions”, “LSCCEQ 5I try to understand the material in the classes by making connections between the readings and the concepts from the lectures”, and “LSCCEQ 6I try to apply ideas from course readings in other class activities such as lecture and discussion”.

(d) Critical Thinking (5 items)

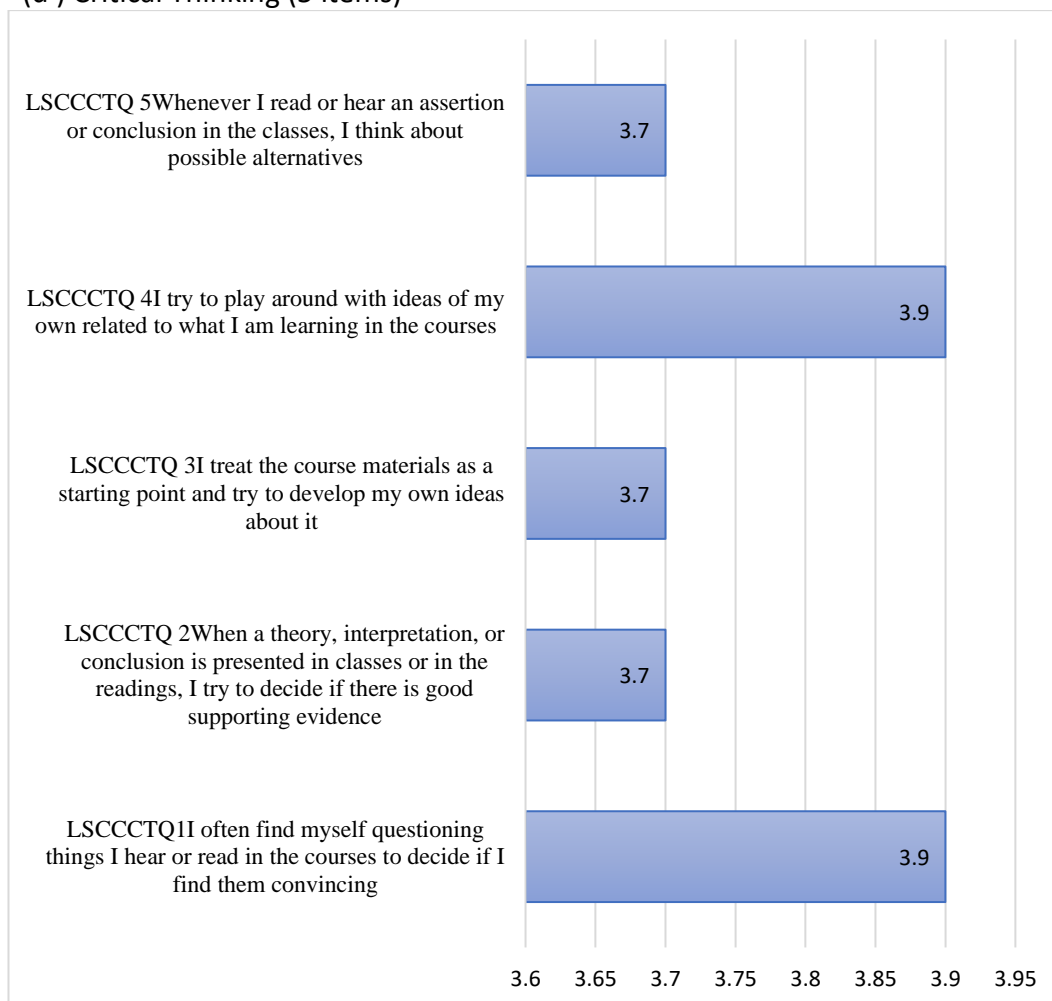


Figure 10- Mean for Critical Thinking

Figure 10 presents the mean for critical thinking. Two items share the same highest mean of 3.9 and they are “LSCCCTQ1 I often find myself questioning things I hear or read in the courses to decide if I find them convincing”, and “LSCCCTQ 4 I try to play around with ideas of my own related to what I am learning in the courses”. Next, four items share a mean of 3.7 and they are “LSCCCTQ 2 When a theory, interpretation, or conclusion is presented in classes or in the readings, I try to decide if there is good supporting evidence”, “LSCCCTQ 3 I treat the course materials as a starting point and try to develop my own ideas about it”, “LSCCCTQ 3 I treat the course materials as a starting point and try to develop my own ideas about it” and “LSCCCTQ 5 Whenever I read or hear an assertion or conclusion in the classes, I think about possible alternatives”.

Findings for Metacognitive Self-Regulation

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners perceive metacognitive self-regulation in language learning?

Metacognitive Self-Regulation (11 items)

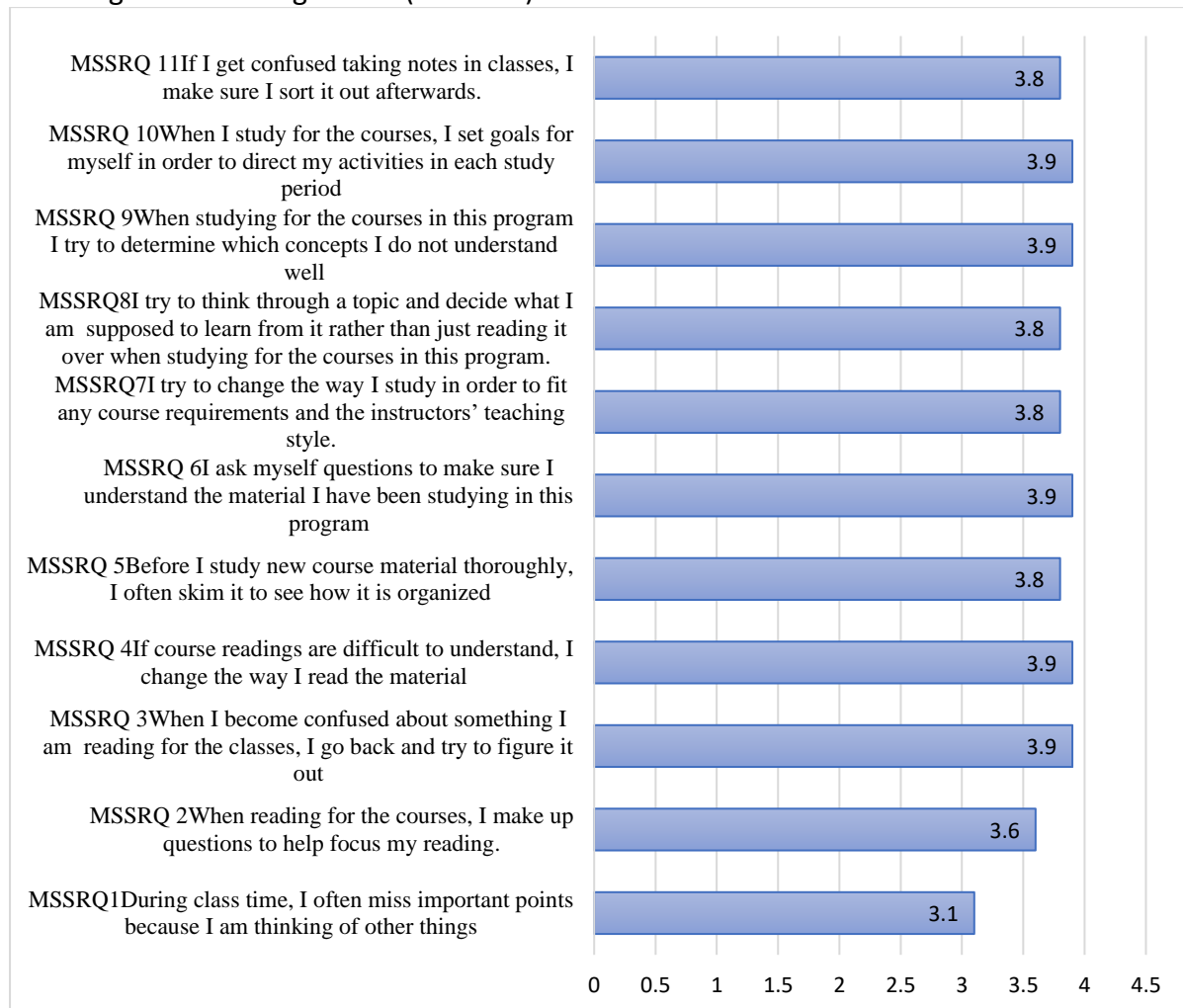


Figure 11 – Mean for Metacognitive Self-Regulation

Figure 11 presents the mean for metacognitive self-regulation. Five items reported the same mean of 3.9 and they are “MSSRQ 3 When I become confused about something I am reading for the classes, I go back and try to figure it out”, “MSSRQ 4 If course readings are difficult to understand, I change the way I read the material”, “MSSRQ 6 I ask myself questions to make sure I understand the material I have been studying in this program”, “MSSRQ 9 When studying for the courses in this program I try to determine which concepts I do not understand well” and “MSSRQ 10 When I study for the courses, I set goals for myself in order to direct my activities in each study period”. The lowest mean is 3.1 for the item “MSSRQ 1 During class time, I often miss important points because I am thinking of other things”.

Findings for Keyword Resource Management

This section presents data to answer research question 3- How learners perceive the use of resource management in language learning?

C. Resource management component (11 items)

(a) Environment Management (5 items)

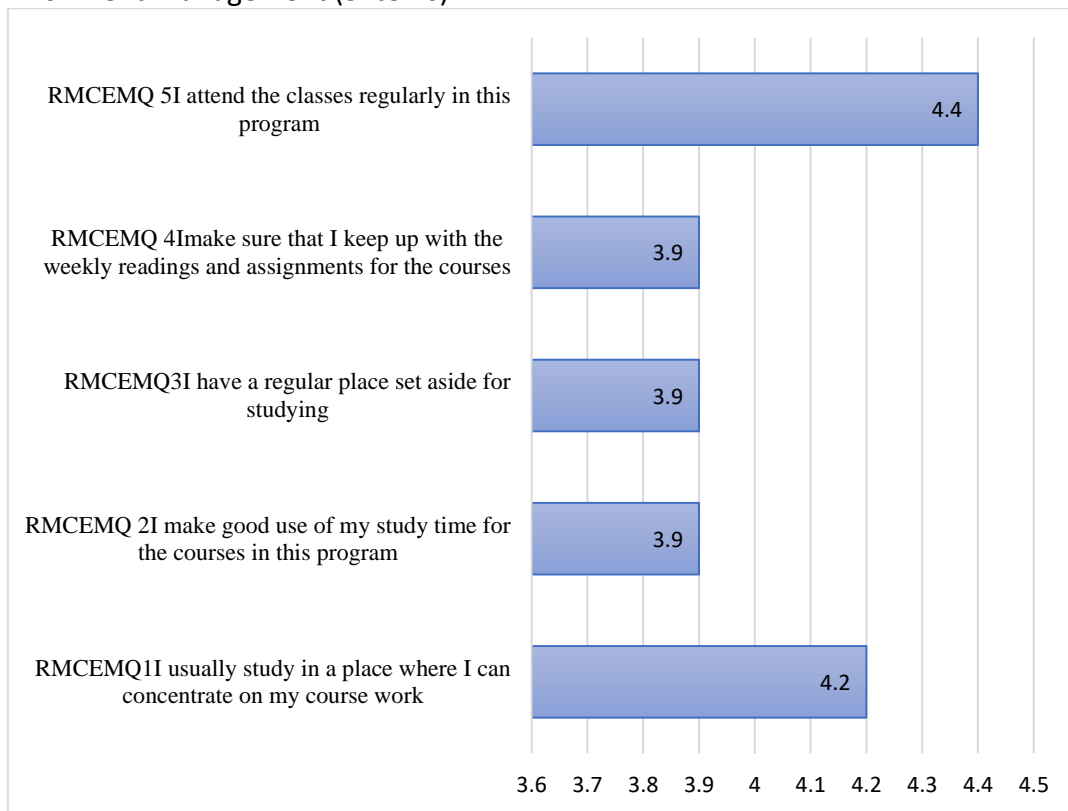


Figure 12 – Mean for Environment Management

Figure 12 shows the mean for environment management. The highest mean is 4.4 for the item “RMCEMQ 5I attend the classes regularly in this program”. Next, the item “RMCEMQ1I usually study in a place where I can concentrate on my course work” reported a mean of 4.2. Three items share the same mean of 3.9 and they are “RMCEMQ 2I make good use of my study time for the courses in this program”, “RMCEMQ3I have a regular place set aside for studying” and “RMCEMQ 4I make sure that I keep up with the weekly readings and assignments for the courses”.

(b) Effort Management (4 items)

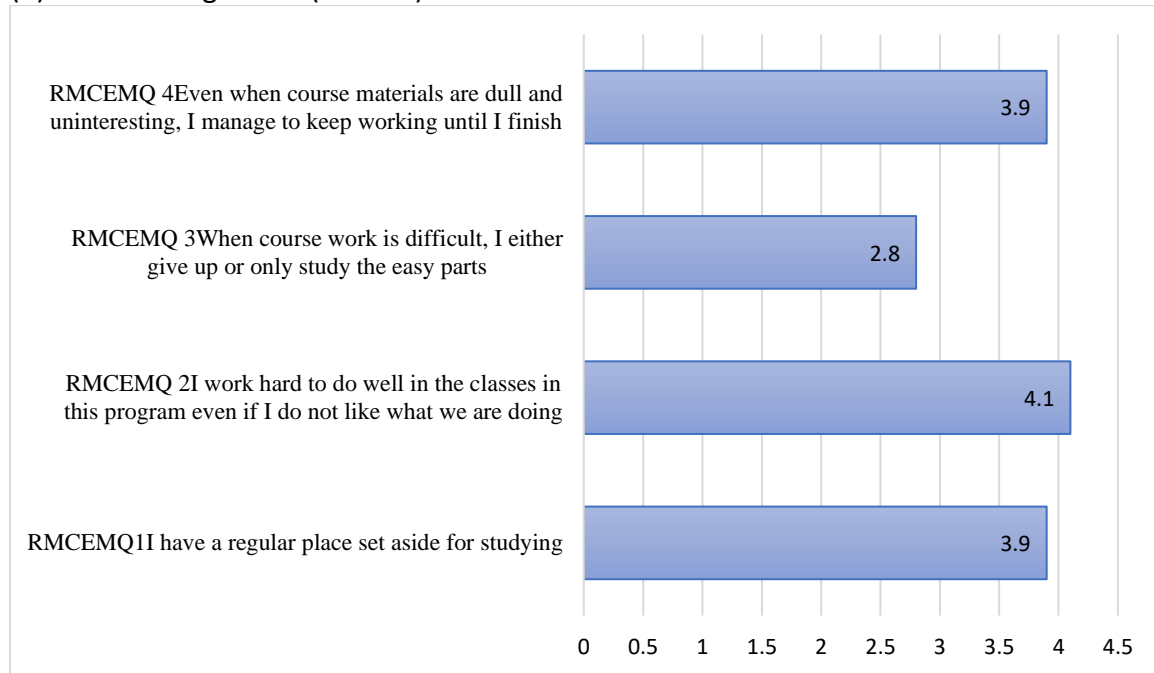


Figure 13- Mean for Effort Management

Figure 13 shows the mean for effort management. The highest mean is 4.1 for “RMCEMQ 2I work hard to do well in the classes in this program even if I do not like what we are doing”. Two items share the same mean of 3.9 and they are “RMCEMQ1I have a regular place set aside for studying” and “RMCEMQ 4Even when course materials are dull and uninteresting, I manage to keep working until I finish”. The lowest mean is 2.8 for “RMCEMQ 3When course work is difficult, I either give up or only study the easy parts”.

(c) Help-Seeking (2 items)

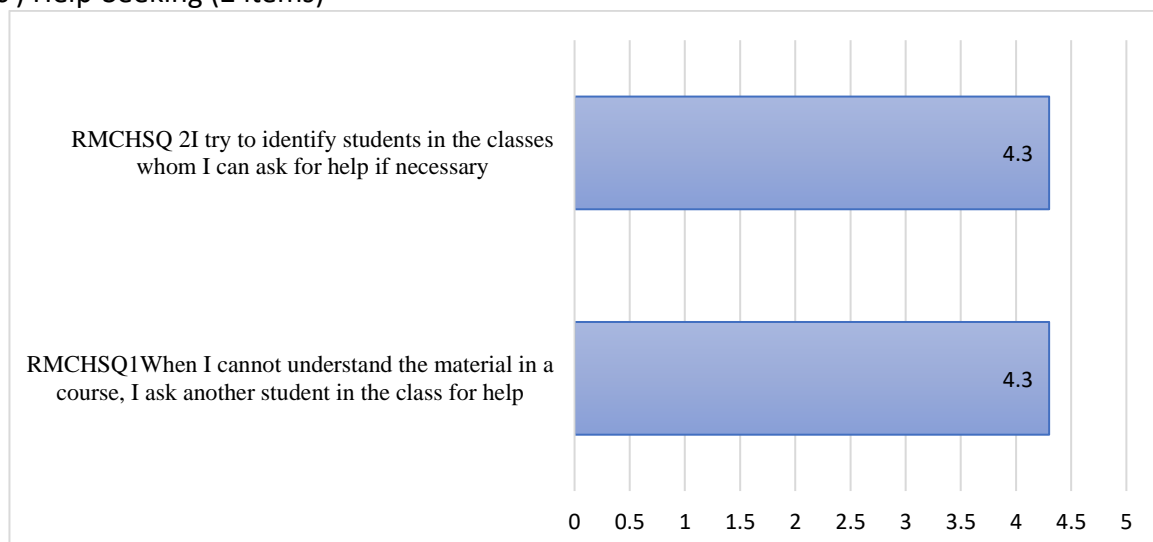


Figure 14 – Mean for Help-Seeking

Figure 14 shows the mean for help-seeking. Two items have the same mean of 4.3 and they are “RMCHSQ1When I cannot understand the material in a course, I ask another student

in the class for help” and “RMCHSQ 2I try to identify students in the classes whom I can ask for help if necessary”.

Findings for relationship of all components

This section presents data to answer research question 4- How do the means differ across all three learning components in language learning? The comparison of total means is shown in table 3 below. The highest mean is resource management with a mean of 4. Next, is cognitive components with a mean of. 3.9 and finally is metacognitive self-regulation with a mean of 3.8.

Table 3

Comparison of Total mean

No	Learning Strategy	Total Mean
1	Resource Management	4
2	Cognitive Components	3.9
3	Metacognitive Self-Regulation	3.8

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

A summary of findings revealed that learners use cognitive components, metacognitive self-regulation and resource management as their learning strategies. Firstly, when it comes to cognitive components, learners use rehearsal, organization, elaboration and also critical thinking skills as part of their learning process. Rehearsal is used so learners can recall important concepts. Organization is a strategy learners use to make sense of several incoming information. Learners depend on elaboration skills to pull together information from different sources. Learners display their critical thinking skills when they need to make decision to support their arguments. Next, the environment plays an important role for learners to stay focused. Having a good learning environment also includes having a circle of social support that the learners can depend on when they need the extra push to learn. Interestingly, the study by Sukying (2021) reported that the most frequently used is affective strategy. This strategy involves the learner depending on their positive feelings to motivate them to learn. Such motivation can also be obtained through a good learning environment. And a summary of the comparison of mean does indicate the most frequent strategy learners depended on was also resource management. Similarly, the study by Habok and Magyar (2018) also found that learning strategies facilitated learners to stay motivated in their learning goals.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

This paper has presented the three language learning strategies students have employed which are Resource management, Cognitive Components and Metacognitive Self-Regulation.

Educators always focus on teaching and learning and overlook the importance of preparing an effective course outline and syllabus (Bano et al, 2019). The findings from this study can help educators understand which language learning strategies learners use, and subsequently assist in designing and planning the course and syllabus according to students' learning strategies, especially on learning environment, materials and resources. For example, from this study, it was found that students are more into Resource Management, where they manage their own learning environment, effort as well as seeking help from

friends. This is related to the aspect of control or autonomy for the learners that can enhance extrinsic motivation as highlighted by Iliyas et.al. (2023). Therefore, in planning activities or tutorials for students, task or project based activities are more suitable than just a plain lecture or individual tasks. For example, project-based Learning (PjBL) is considered suitable for higher institutions as it can help students to participate in real problem-solving and knowledge construction, which are skills needed for them to survive in the workplace later in the future (Guo et al, 2020).

As we now have stepped into the 4IR world, most education platforms and tools are in the form of digital. Students nowadays are digitally literate and know how and where to access the information they need, as well as having the expertise to navigate their ways through the latest technologies. Moreover, most of the students enrolled in tertiary education nowadays are from Gen Z, or as known as Digital Natives (Maqbool et al, 2020). Gen Z are known to be digitally literate, with technology being at the center of their everyday lives (Miller & Mills, 2019). Therefore, it would be beneficial for researchers to study the relationship between learning strategies and students as Digital Natives. For instance, researchers can investigate how the digitalisation of education as well as the plethora of digital learning tools nowadays affect the way students choose their learning strategies. Research can also be done in investigating the apps or websites commonly used for students to facilitate their learning, and classify these apps or websites according to the learning strategies. This way, students can make the study as a reference in choosing the best tool, suitable with the language strategies of their own choosing.

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