

Reflections of ESL and EFL Students Through Email

Happy Goh & Tan Kim Luan

This paper compares the reflections on language learning, learning strategies, and motivational level of two groups of students. The first group had first year Singaporean undergraduates from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and the second had Chinese postgraduates from the Faculties of Science and Engineering. In keeping with modern technology, these students emailed the lecturers their reactions to classroom activities, difficulties encountered and strategies used in language learning. The results indicated some differences in attitude towards language learning, learning strategies, and motivational level between the two groups of students.

Introduction

As English language teachers we are always asking ourselves how best we can help our students learn the target language more effectively. We wonder if the activities in class have been beneficial to all; we wonder if what was taught have been learnt by all. We have observed that some students are able to progress faster than others while some have problems struggling to improve their English proficiency, and we want to find out why this is so.

One of the ways to enable teachers to become aware of the learning needs and difficulties of individual students is to ask students to keep a journal or diary. This will provide a channel for students to give feedback to teachers, not only of their difficulties but also their opinions of class lessons. By analysing and evaluating their learning, students are actively participating in the learning process. In fact, studies on learner strategies, learner beliefs, attitudes and perceptions (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991; Wenden & Rubin, 1987) have shown that when language learners think about their language learning, they can benefit from their reflections. Teachers too can

learn from the reflections of their students what effective and ineffective strategies are, and what difficulties they face in completing the tasks assigned. They can modify their teaching methods to meet the needs of the students. In this way, a learner-centred approach is adopted.

In order to investigate these learner strategies, learner beliefs, attitudes and perceptions, and other areas such as learner anxiety and cultural issues, language learning diaries are used. The first published analysis of the “non-introspective” type is Bailey and Ochsner’s (1983) work on competitiveness and anxiety in adult second language learners. In another investigation, Matsumoto (1989) analysed the diary of a 19-year old Japanese girl who reflected upon her language learning experience in an intensive English course in the United States. In some studies, in addition to the diaries, qualitative investigations such as questionnaires, structured reviews and classroom observations were used (Matsumoto, 1996).

According to Bailey and Ochsner (1983: 189), “a diary study in second language learning, acquisition or teaching is an account of a second language experience as recorded in a first person journal”. The diarist thus writes about “affective factors, language learning strategies, and his own perceptions”. Of course the scope of what could be written in the diary can be narrowed depending on the purpose of the diarist or researcher. One kind of diary is that of “language learning histories” which describes past events of months or years ago. Another form of a learner diary is the “difficulties diary” suggested by Tudor (1996). Students record only the problems they have experienced in the use of the language over a given period of time. Thus, the teacher can respond to whatever difficulties students face and suggest ways to help them overcome such problems. It is this particular aspect of teachers’ understanding and response to the problems of language learning that we are interested in.

The purpose of this study was to sensitise teachers to the specific needs of two groups of learners studying at the Centre for English Language Communication. These are ESL undergraduates and EFL graduate students. With more foreign students, for whom English is a foreign language, enrolling at the National University of Singapore, we are faced with a greater challenge of

understanding their “linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds”. (Wong, 1997: 5). Therefore, we hope that by comparing the reflections of ESL and EFL learners, we would gain a better understanding of the foreign students’ learning process so as to help them write and speak English effectively.

Research Methodology

Keeping a Diary

There are basically 2 types of language learning diary studies (Bailey, 1991). The first involves the researcher who is also the diarist while the second is the researcher analysing the diaries written by other language learners. Matsumoto (1989) has called the first type “introspective” diary studies and the second type “non-introspective” studies

The conventional way of keeping a diary is to use a book. However, with the increasing trend towards the use of computers in language learning and teaching, the email is another means whereby students can record their reflections.

In our project, we chose email because of its rising popularity over the conventional written form of communication and its advantage of immediacy as we only saw our students twice a week and needed to respond to them quickly. Besides, the students themselves had busy schedules and were unable to meet us. This also explains why we were interested in the “difficulties diary” in a “non-introspective” way.

Collecting the Diary

Allwright and Bailey (1991) suggest that frequent periodic reviews may not be helpful as it is likely to put pressure on the students. Alternatively, they suggest a weekly discussion session where students can share some thoughts written in their diary. In addition, it is also possible to collect diaries at the end of the entire course.

With these recommendations in mind, we asked our students to keep a journal via email. Drawing from their reflections through email, we compared the difficulties in language learning,

motivational level and learning strategies, of these 2 groups of students. For our study we asked the students to email us once a week from Week 2 to Week 10 of their 12-week course.

Participants

The students involved in this project were 13 first year undergraduates from the Arts and Social Science Faculty and 12 postgraduate students from the Engineering Faculty. The undergraduates are all Singaporeans while the postgraduates are all from the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Profile of Singapore and PRC Students

In multiracial Singapore, English is one of the four official languages, used extensively at work, socially and professionally. Its importance as an international language and a lingua franca is well acknowledged by all Singaporeans. English is therefore used in schools as a medium of instruction for all subjects taught except the mother tongue, the language of the ethnic group to which students belong. For most Singaporean students, English is their second language. On the other hand, in the PRC, Chinese is the official language and the medium of instruction in schools and universities. English is taught in an EFL situation.

A student in Singapore normally spends 6 years in primary school, 4 years in secondary schools and 2 years in junior college. He takes 2 major external examinations, the GCE 'O' and 'A' levels, for his English Language. Students are tested on comprehension, summary and essay writing in these 2 major exams. There is an oral component in the GCE 'O' level but not in the 'A' level. There are no multiple-choice questions. Similarly, an average postgraduate student has learned English for about 10 – 12 years. However, the testing is different. There are more multiple-choice questions and less written work. Moreover, there is no oral examination.

Overall, a Singapore student has had 12 years of exposure to English in school. In addition, he has also been exposed to the various American and British programmes in the cinemas, and on television and radio. Furthermore, he would have had opportunities to communicate with various members of the community, local and

international. Unlike the Singapore undergraduates, the postgraduates have not had the kind of exposure to English and the different varieties of English, in the community or through the media. They have fewer opportunities to communicate in English.

Proficiency Course for Undergraduates and Postgraduates

All first year undergraduates from the various faculties who scored a B4 and below for General Paper in the GCE 'A' level examination must take the Qualifying English Test (QET). QET is a written test set by the Centre for English language Communication (CELC) to determine if these students need to take the English proficiency classes.

All postgraduate students who are foreigners and from non-English medium universities must take the Diagnostic English Test (DET), a written test set by CELC. These students have to undergo an oral interview also.

In the proficiency classes for the Arts and Social Sciences, the main objective of the course is to make the students effective readers and writers so that they can cope with their academic work. They are taught to read academic texts and to synthesise relevant ideas to complete a given task. They are also taught how to plan and write essays. They have to sit for a written examination at the end of the course.

Activities carried out in the proficiency classes for the Arts and Social Sciences Faculty and the Engineering Faculty include group discussions, peer work, and conferencing between the tutor and student. However, while undergraduates have informal oral presentations, postgraduate students have formal oral presentations. For both groups of students, the proficiency course is not an intensive one as it is spread over 12 weeks with the students spending 4 hours each week in class, 2 hours per lesson.

Procedure

In the second week of the course, all students involved in the project were asked to reflect on their language learning experience. To help them focus, we gave students instructions on how to write about their reactions to class lessons, their suggestions

to improve them, the difficulties they faced in learning any of the language skills, the strategies used to learn a language skill, their progress in any aspect of learning and, their feelings regarding the learning of English. They were asked to email their tutors at least once every week for a period of 8 weeks regarding their learning experience. The tutors, in turn, would respond to them accordingly.

We also gave the students information on the different types of learning strategies based on the strategies mentioned by Oxford (1990) and Chamot (1987). Chamot defines learning strategies as “techniques, or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information” (Chamot, 1987: 71). They were asked to indicate if they practised any of the strategies.

This study sets out to examine three main aspects: difficulties in language learning, the motivational level and learning strategies of the 2 groups of students.

Results and Discussion

Difficulties

From the email responses, the Singaporean Arts undergraduates’ difficulties were grammar, sentence structure, expression of ideas and writing skills. They reported having problems with aspects of grammar such as subject-verb agreement, tense usage and sentence construction, as illustrated in the following reflections.

“Don’t realise I have so many problems with grammar”

“Writing long or very long sentences and making errors in tenses as a result; careless at times”

Other problems such as expressions and aspects of writing skills like use of connectives, organisation and development are reflected below.

“Organisation – topic sentence; long-winded”

“Sentence structure, run-on sentences and connectives. We need few connectives when writing Chinese essays.” (This student took Chinese as a first language in secondary school).

“Constructing good sentences; can’t express myself well; ideas are very limited; can’t develop the paragraph. Can express myself best in Chinese and find appropriate words to describe the feeling.” (This student took Chinese as a first language in secondary school).

As for the Chinese Engineering postgraduates, their difficulties are more diverse. Like the Singaporean Arts undergraduates in our study, they have problems with sentence structure, expression of ideas and writing skills, but have less difficulty with grammar generally. The following reflections reveal their difficulties.

“One problem I met is that I often can’t find the appropriate word to express my thought.”

“I feel more difficult in my writing...In my second composition writing, I repeat many words many times. The structure of composition is clear now. But the content is not clear.”

“The most difficult thing for me is how to express myself clearly, sometimes I cannot remember the words I have learned, and also I don’t know how the words should be used.”

“When writing I check the exact meaning of some words and expressions and try to use them correctly. But sometimes it is hard to distinguish which should be used as a formal expression.”

As can be seen, Chinese postgraduates have difficulty with expression because of limited exposure to the English language, inadequate vocabulary and the inability to use words accurately and appropriately. Like the Singaporean students, Chinese postgraduates also have difficulty with writing skills, as reflected in the following comments:

“I hope to improve my writing ability as soon as possible. But I didn’t often know how to do.”

“I’ve made progress in both speaking and writing, though I feel there is still difficulty for me to write a paper.”

These students also reported problems with speaking and listening skills.

“The big problem is oral English and listening.”

“Another problem is my listening which I think is the poorest part. If people speak clearly and not so fast, I can understand, but if they speak fast and connect words together or use unfamiliar expressions, I can’t understand.”

“I have told you that my listening comprehension is not very good. I think the reason is my pronunciation, at some time I don’t understand the words from their pronunciation, even I know their spell very well.”

“My problem in English studying is little confidence to speak out.”

From the above reflections, the Chinese postgraduates’ problems in oral/aural skills range from limited vocabulary, pace and connected speech of interlocutors, to poor pronunciation due to lack of confidence. A further problem they face is the limited opportunities for practising speaking and listening on campus because of the large population of Singaporean Chinese and Chinese nationals in NUS. As a result, they often converse in Chinese. Hence, a postgraduate commented:

“...there are so many persons around us who can speak Chinese. The result is the reduce force to improve English.”

Both groups of students have learnt English for more than ten years, but their language proficiency level is inadequate to meet the requirements of academic and professional work. The reasons for the unsatisfactory command of English for the two groups differ vastly. For the Singaporean undergraduates, the emphasis on group work under the communicative approach has led to reduced instruction and practice in grammar and structure. In addition, the overwhelming success of the *Speak Mandarin* campaign has encouraged the widespread use of Chinese in schools, homes and public places, and this has led to a decline in the use of standard spoken English; *Singlish* and even code-mixing have become popular. Added to this, students are not reading enough outside of

class. On the other hand, the heavy workload of English teachers in both primary and secondary schools - large classes of about 40, and innumerable written assignments and extra duties - leave them with little time and energy to give personal attention to individual students' language needs. Consequently, these undergraduates are generally fluent, but they are only fairly accurate in their utterances, and this affects the way they write. Hence, their writing lacks grammatical accuracy, syntactical maturity and precision of expression even after 12 years of English language instruction.

For the Chinese postgraduates, English has been learned as a foreign language and hence, they have had few opportunities to practise speaking and listening skills; besides, their oral English has never been tested and assessed. This is why they have difficulties in oral communication, especially in the initial period after their arrival in Singapore. In particular, they have difficulties understanding the English of Singaporeans, Indian nationals and other nationalities, having been exposed only to American English (Voice of America programmes being very popular in China). Because of the differences in structure and word usage between Chinese and English, these students when using translation to facilitate communication make mistakes in word choice and expressions. And as their language learning experience in China required them to write a short guided essay, which only constitutes 15% of the total marks in the College English Tests, students have had little practice in writing skills such as organisation, development of ideas, coherence and cohesion, tone and style.

Between the two groups, it is obvious that the Chinese postgraduates had more difficulties with the language than the Singaporean undergraduates, and consequently, their anxiety levels were higher, as revealed in their reflections.

“Sometimes I’m afraid to talk to someone in English language. My brain empty. I’m too nervous to answer it.”

“My project needs me to work in the refining plant from March 1st. I was told that the guys in that plant will talk with me fastly by English. I was a little nervous about this, my listening English is not very good, but this project will be decided by my performance, I must get the customers’ trust at the beginning time. Can you give me any advices on enhancing my listening in two weeks?”

Most Chinese postgraduates have hinted that they face a lot of pressure in their communication with their supervisors because of the need to convey ideas on their research in English, and the need to understand their supervisors' instructions given in English. The many kinds of English accents of teaching staff in NUS can pose listening difficulties for Chinese postgraduates and it is possible that many of these Chinese students may be too embarrassed or shy to ask their supervisors to repeat their instructions. Communicating well with their supervisors is particularly important as they are expected to carry out research independently unlike in China where they were given close supervision. Also, here at NUS, they have to attend classes that are conducted in English, and do assignments that require them to write as many as 3,000 words compared to the 150-word assignments at the College English Examinations. On top of all this, they have to make seminar presentations in English and respond to questions in English. They also need to complete a 40,000-word dissertation in order to fulfil the Masters' requirements, a task that seems daunting as they have never written a research report in English before coming to study in NUS.

The heavy course and research load and the different style of supervision coupled with the lack of an adequate proficiency in the language have led to anxiety for Chinese postgraduate students. Hillson (1996) similarly noted the high anxiety of foreign scholars in an English medium school in Singapore. Campbell and Ortiz (cited in Hillson, 1996: 273) also observed "alarming levels of anxiety in post-secondary students enrolled in foreign language courses in competitive environments." Thus it is likely that the above comments such as "nervous" and "this project will be decided by my performance" indicate some degree of anxiety and the stress for the foreign students trying to perfect their English.

Motivation

It is therefore not surprising that the Chinese postgraduates are more motivated in their language learning than the Singaporean Arts undergraduates. The reflections of the Chinese students show that they desire to be more proficient in English so that they can perform well in their studies and to achieve a successful career. Some examples of these are presented in the following statements:

“English is the main language in Singapore. Not only in daily life but also in my research work, English plays a more and more important role in my life. So I have to pay much attention to it.”

“The big problem is oral English and listening. Please give some suggestion so that I am able to make a great progress with my English.”

“I think if I have enough time, I will study hard on EI. Because I know it is so important for me to do everything in the future.”

“I understand how to prepare for a presentation, how to... They are important in my future job.”

Thus, for the Chinese students, English language learning is viewed as important for academic and professional success. It is significant that there was no evidence of similar motivation for language learning in the reflections of the Singapore students. They perceive their command of the language to be adequate since they are able to use the language for social and academic purposes and have managed to pass major exams as well as their English Proficiency courses.

We observe that the motivation to learn the language also increased with perceived success among the weaker students of both groups, as seen in the following reports of students of lower proficiency. Reflections from the Chinese postgraduate students and Singaporean undergraduates respectively are reproduced below.

“My proficiency level of English language has gotten some progress, especially in effective communication, writing and oral ability. Now I have enough courage to talk to others in the English language. I am not afraid of writing, have found some effective ways to improve the weakest sides from the course and by you. As time pass, I will make a big jump in my English language.”

“Through your feedback, I knew that I make fewer grammar errors now and I am happy that I do make some progress. I know that I am still far from B+ and I will work harder.”

One could sense the motivation to work hard at raising proficiency in these reflections of the weaker students who had been given the needed support and guidance. However, for the more proficient Singaporean undergraduates in the course, motivation was low, as they did not think they had made vast improvements in the many years of language learning. The “plateau” effect of progress in language learning had set in. Besides, they believed that their ability to communicate fluently though not accurately is adequate for functioning in academic and professional situations. Therefore they tend to be complacent, as seen in their low frequency of email responses and minimal efforts in their course assignments.

Another reason for this “relaxed” attitude towards the English course, also evident among some Chinese postgraduates, is that the English proficiency course is viewed as a subsidiary subject and regarded as less important than their content-based courses, and when the pressure is on, it receives little attention. They feel that they have “more important” tasks such as course work, research and writing assignments to attend to. However, for the Chinese postgraduates, motivation continued to be high as they believe that being able to communicate accurately and fluently is the prerequisite for achieving academic and professional success, but the demands of their Masters’ degree course do not seem to allow them sufficient time for learning English. This internal conflict is expressed in the following reflections of the Chinese postgraduates, something not evident among those of the Singaporean undergraduates.

“Although I am clear that my English is poor and I need to enhance my abilities on writing, speaking, listening of English, at present I have to work hard on reading and writing papers.”

“ I think the most efficient way is that during one period of time studying English is the task to face. In fact, it will save time. But now when leaving English class we have to do something more important. Then the time left for English learning is too little.”

As we can see, in general, the two groups differ significantly in their motivation towards learning English, due to differences in proficiency levels and attitudes about language learning.

Strategies

We noticed that the students' email responses focused on the skills they have problems with, and that their reporting on strategies was limited mainly to direct strategies and socio-affective factors. Results from a questionnaire containing a comprehensive list of strategies compiled by Chamot showed a wider range of strategies. In our analysis of strategies, we will focus on the important strategies used by both groups, as the differences seem minor.

Both groups reported seeking help from the tutor and working together with tutorial mates as important strategies they use in language learning.

"Sorry I have another composition for you. Please have a look at it. There are many things to be improved. I hope I can get the improvements from you."

"I think I should do more practice to improve my English skill. Could you please give us some advises? With your help, we can improve our English skill quickly. "

"Learned a lot from others' achievement. "

"Find out what's wrong in my own speaking from others' speaking. "

"I learned a lot from your comments and the feedback of others. "

"I like discussion that let me not afraid to speak in English even though I will do something wrong. "

"Reading peers' essays; asking teacher to help in writing skills."

"Have peer and conferencing activities to help each other and spot errors."

"Ask tutor for help."

Young's (1987) study of Chinese children indicated that they were more adult-oriented learners than non-Chinese children, and therefore looked more consistently to their teachers for guidance and support than they did to one another. Our students' responses seem to suggest that this is not true for our students as they are older, and are willing to learn from both tutor and peers.

Also, our study does not support Melton's (1990) findings on "Chinese Students' Learning Style Preferences". Unlike the Chinese postgraduates in our study, her Chinese students (in China) did not like group learning. Our findings are consistent with those of Chu et al's (1997) study, which revealed that both Chinese postgraduates in NUS and Singaporean students like group learning. The difference between our findings and Melton's may be due to the fact that the Chinese students in our study, who had never had the experience of group work in China, have been exposed to it here and have developed a liking for it.

Other strategies both groups employed were reading and practising in the respective skills of focus. The Singaporean undergraduates did writing and grammar exercises, while the Chinese postgraduates were engaged in listening, speaking and writing activities. Both groups also read recommended reference books. For example, the Singaporean undergraduates consulted grammar reference books; the Chinese postgraduates read books on writing. Both groups also liked to learn to write by examining writing models. The following extracts from their reflections in Table 1 illustrate the popular use of these strategies.

Table 1 Popular Strategies used by Chinese Postgraduates and Singaporean Undergraduates

Read on different subjects	Read newspapers
Read CNN text	Listen to BBC
Watch films	Write emails
Talk to English-speaking colleagues	Like practising speaking
Reading my peers' essays	Learn from example you gave

We noted that our students were actively using some of the above-mentioned strategies, and yet were asking for more ways to improve their proficiency, as seen in the following reflections:

“I think I should do more practice to improve my English skill. Could you please give us some advises? With your help, we can improve our English skill quickly. ”

“I want to make use of my every spare time to learn English. Can you please give me some advice on how to improve my English step by step?”

From our conversations with individual students who expressed frustration and impatience over the seemingly slow returns for their efforts, we realise that our students follow their teachers’ advice without assessing their particular needs, and hence, they are not clear about the purpose for adopting a piece of given advice. Vann and Abraham (1990) noted in their study that unsuccessful learners were active strategy users, but they applied strategies inappropriately. They suggested that unsuccessful learners lacked higher-order processes or metacognitive strategies, which would enable them to use the relevant strategies to meet their linguistic needs. In our study, we observed this to be true, as both groups rarely reported using metacognitive strategies such as analysing linguistic demands, reflecting on language learning and self-monitoring. Hence, most of our students chose inappropriate strategies.

For example, a student listened to BBC news regularly, thinking somehow it would improve his English. But when asked why he was listening to BBC news, he said it would help to raise his proficiency. But at the same time, he complained he was unable to follow most of it. When the teacher probed further to find out why he had difficulty following the BBC news, she discovered the reason to be his poor pronunciation. The teacher then helped the student to arrive at his objective for listening: to improve his pronunciation. She directed him to obtain the text, listen to how it was read, and examine whether there were differences between his pronunciation and the newsreader’s. And this gradually enabled him to listen with better understanding.

Similarly, our students often told us that they were reading the newspapers to improve their English, but saw no improvement in their proficiency. After making our students analyse their problems, we directed them to the appropriate sections of the newspaper, such as the *Forum Page* in *The Straits Times* on social issues, or the lighter sections of the paper, where articles of general

interest are located. They were encouraged to read these, and collect vocabulary of specified categories for learning, review and use. Consequently, they commented that reading such sections had exposed them to words of general use which, in turn, had increased their grasp of word meanings and their use.

From the above reflections and our observations, it is obvious that both groups of students need help in identifying their specific needs, guidance in choosing effective strategies and setting clear goals for themselves so that they can measure their achievements. Giving them broad unfocused traditional advice such as “read more, listen more” is like throwing them prematurely into the deep ocean.

As we were concerned about the difficulties with expression by both groups, we specially noted the use of strategies related to vocabulary learning. We found that contextualisation, that is, placing a word/phrase in a meaningful context which aids the accurate use of a word/phrase, and grouping which helps systematic, efficient learning and retention of vocabulary, were among the less popularly used strategies for the two groups. In fact, the Chinese group reported fewer instances of these strategies. This finding is consistent with those of Chamot, Kupper, and Impink-Hernandez (cited in O'Malley & Chamot, 1990: 123). These strategies were among the lower frequency strategies cited by high school ESL students and native English speaking students learning a foreign language. The infrequent use of grouping and contextualisation may partly account for the problem with expression of ideas by both groups, the problem being more acute for the Chinese postgraduate students. So, in terms of the repertoire of strategies, both groups do not differ significantly. They need to increase their use of metacognitive strategies and vocabulary-related cognitive strategies.

Conclusion

We set out to do a diary study of students' reflections over a period of 8 weeks, but due to the tight schedule of our students and the fact that their English course was not intensive, comprising a total of four hours weekly, the students on average emailed us only 2-3 times. Reflections were brief and focused on difficulties

they faced. Hence, our study in reality was a “difficulties” e-diary, reflecting and seeking help at the same time.

Our study, which compared Singaporean undergraduates with Chinese postgraduates in terms of their difficulties, motivation and learning strategies, shows that the Chinese group had more difficulties, but were more motivated learners than the Singaporean group. In terms of strategy use, they were similar. Both groups needed to choose more effective strategies for efficient learning of the language.

Implications From Our Study

- The learning philosophy of intermediate ESL learners has to be broadened so that they would realise that language learning requires attention to both function and form in order to be able to function adequately in both academic and professional settings. To offset stagnation in language learning, Harmer (1998) suggests that they should be shown what they still need to learn, be assigned challenging tasks and made to analyse language more thoroughly.
- The multifaceted language difficulties faced by the EFL postgraduates in a new challenging academic environment has led to high anxiety, which could be debilitating or facilitating. Tutors must be sensitive to this, and seek to create a conducive learning environment to reduce stress and promote learning.
- Both Singapore undergraduates and Chinese postgraduates need guidance in identifying needs, choice of relevant strategies and setting of realistic goals. To increase vocabulary mastery, they need to be given practice in the strategies of contextualisation and grouping.
- Classroom instruction of writing skills, grammar and structure in the secondary schools need to be re-examined to strengthen Singapore students’ accurate use of the language and written skills.

- ESL/EFL students should be encouraged to write difficulties diaries as part of their learning programme. Whether in email form or on loose-leaf sheets of paper, they serve as a channel of communication with the teacher, providing a means of getting specific help and feedback for effective teaching and learning. In addition, they serve to reduce anxiety level, especially for the EFL learner and, they can become an avenue for reflection on learning and provide encouragement to work independently on specific skills or strategies.

References

- Allwright, D., & Bailey, K. M. (1991). *Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bailey, K. M. (1991). Diary studies of classroom language learning: The doubting game and the believing game. In E. Sadtono (Ed.), *Language Acquisition and the Second/Foreign Language Classroom* (pp. 60-102). SEAMEO Anthology Series no. 28. Singapore: SEAMO Regional Language Centre.
- Bailey, K. M., & Ochsner, R. (1983). A methodological review of the diary studies: Windmill tilting or social science? In K. M. Bailey, M. Long & S. Peck (Eds.), *Second Language Acquisition Studies* (pp. 188-198). Rowley, Mass: Newbury House.
- Chamot, A. U. (1987). The learning strategies of ESL. In A. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learning Strategies in Language Learning* (pp. 71-83). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Chu, L., Kitchen, T., & Chew, M. L. (1997). How do we learn best?: Preferences and strategies in learning and teaching styles at the National University of Singapore. *STETS Language and Communication Review*, 1997(1), 14-32.

- Harmer, J. (1998). *How to Teach English*. Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Limited.
- Hilleson, M. (1996). I want to talk with them, but I don't want them to hear: An introspective study of second language anxiety in an English-medium school. In K. M. Bailey & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Voices from the Language Classroom* (pp. 248- 275). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Matsumoto, K. (1989). An analysis of a Japanese ESL learner's diary: Factors involved in the L2 learning process. *JALT Journal*, 11(2), 167-192.
- Matsumoto, K. (1996). Helping L2 learners reflect on classroom learning. *ELT Journal*, 50(2), 143-149.
- Melton, C. (1990). Bridging the cultural gap: A study of Chinese students' learning style preferences. *RELC Journal*, 21(1), 29-54.
- O'Malley, J. M. & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*. New York: Newsbury House Publishers.
- Oxford, R. L., & Green, J. M. (1996). Language learning histories: Learners and teachers helping each other understand learning styles and strategies. *TESOL Journal*, 6(1), 20-23.
- Tudor, I. (1996). *Learner-centredness as Language Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vann, R. J., & Abraham, R. G. (1990). Strategies of unsuccessful language learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 24, 177-198.
- Wenden, A. L. (1991) *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy*. London: Prentice Hall.

- Wenden, A. L., & Rubin, J. (1987). *Learner Strategies in Language Learning*. London: Prentice Hall.
- Wong, L. A. (1997). The teaching of English and Communication Skills in Singapore tertiary institutions: Current situation and future directions. *STETS Language and Communication Review*, 1997(1), 3-6.
- Young, R. (1987). The cultural context of TESOL – A review of research into Chinese classrooms. *RELC Journal*, 18(2), 15-30.