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Exploring The Relationship of Language Learning Strategies: The Case for Learning Japanese

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Abstract

Language learning strategies have been considered to play significant roles in foreign language learning. The present study focuses on how learners perceive their use of learning strategies and also determining the relationships between language learning strategies. This study employed the classification of learning strategies by Wenden and Rubin (1987) namely Cognitive Components and Metacognitive Self-Regulation. This study also includes Resource Management strategy to complement the main strategies. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire that was distributed to 239 students from various discipline backgrounds. The findings revealed that there are strong correlations between the three main strategies. It was also found that Resource Management strategy was the most used strategy by the students, specifically the Help-Seeking strategy.

Keywords: Learning Strategies, Japanese Language, Cognitive Components, Metacognitive Self-Regulation and Resource Management.

Introduction

Background of Study

In Malaysia, in addition to English, other foreign languages are also taught in secondary schools and universities. The Japanese language is one of the most popular foreign languages in Malaysia. However, learning a foreign language in a country remote from its birthplace is no easy feat. It needs effective language learning strategies to achieve proficiency and success in language acquisition. Oxford (2003) stated that language learning styles and strategies are among the main factors that help determine how and how well students learn a foreign language. Oxford (1990) also defined learning strategies 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" (p.8). Previous researchers have come up with various taxonomies of learning strategies. The taxonomies are the results of research efforts that concentrate on the good language learner. Oxford (1990); O'Malley and Chamot (1990), and Wenden (1991) have classified strategies into cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

Cognitive strategies are thought of as mental operations that are specifically focused on processing information to learn, that is for obtaining, storing, retrieving, or use of information. Metacognitive strategies, on the other hand, are used to oversee, regulate, or self-direct language learning. They involve various processes such as planning, prioritising, setting goals, and self-management.

Statement of Problem

Numerous research have attested to the fact that learning strategies help learners learn more successfully both in the classroom and foster more efficient development of learners' mastery of the target language after leaving school (Wong and Nunan, 2011). However, there is still a lot more to be done to understand how learning strategies work, and how the strategies are inter-connected with each other.

Zakaria et al (2017) studied the relationship between language learning strategies and learner autonomy in learning Japanese. 20 students participated in answering the questionnaire. Their investigations revealed that students used most of the learning strategies at an average level of frequency. It was also found that there was a highly significant correlation between language-learning strategies and the extent of learner autonomy. Another study conducted by Yunus et al (2022) investigated learning strategies among 54 university students in USIM. They utilised Oxford's (1990) classifications of learning strategies that are divided into two main categories which are direct and indirect strategies. The results of their investigations revealed that the students' use of learning strategies is rather moderate with an average mean score of 3.38. The metacognitive strategy was the most used while the affective strategies were the least used strategies.

Various studies in this area have been conducted focusing on different perspectives and using different frameworks. Previous studies in Malaysia utilized a small number of participants such as stated above. Thus, the current study increased the number of participants to obtain more accurate data. The larger the sample size, the more accurate the average values will be. Larger sample sizes also help researchers identify outliers in data and provide smaller margins of error.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

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

- How do learners perceive their use of cognitive components in foreign language learning?
- How do learners perceive their use of metacognitive self-regulation in foreign language learning?
- How do learners perceive their use of resource management in foreign language learning?
- Is there a relationship between all learning components in foreign language learning?

Literature Review

Strategies for Learning Foreign Languages

Learning language strategies play an important role in the learning process. An integral aspect of language acquisition involves employing effective language learning strategies. Consequently, there is increasing research within the domain of language learning strategies, aiming to identify the most frequently utilized strategies by students. According to Hardan

(2013), a crucial part of language acquisition is utilising language learning strategies, which significantly contribute to the learning process.

From past studies, the phrase 'language strategies' has become more important lately, covering different methods and techniques that learners use when doing language-related activities. Essentially, it pertains to learners' methodologies while engaging in language activities. Chamot and Kupper (1989) explain the findings of a three-year project that investigated how foreign language students and teachers use learning strategies. The project comprises three studies: a descriptive study identifying strategies in foreign language study, a longitudinal study comparing effective and ineffective learners' strategy use over time, and a course development study wherein instructors taught learning strategies. The paper suggests classroom applications, including fostering metacognition and motivation by identifying existing strategies and modeling additional techniques to enhance students' effectiveness and independence in language learning.

On the other hand, the journey of learning a foreign language is a gateway to personal growth, cultural enrichment, and improved communication skills. Learning a foreign language can be a rewarding but challenging task. O'Malley et al (1985) categorized learning strategies into three distinct groups: metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective. As per Oxford (1990), learning strategies can be classified into two primary categories: direct and indirect strategies. Direct learning strategies encompass memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, while indirect learning strategies include meta-cognitive, affective, and social strategies. Bolukbas (2013) found that, during the process of learning Turkish, students used language learning strategies at a moderate level. Among the various types of strategies, metacognitive strategies were found to be the most frequently utilised, while affective strategies were applied to the least extent. In conclusion, previous studies have demonstrated how important language learning strategies are in language acquisition. People are increasingly curious about finding out the best ways for students to learn languages.

Past Studies on Foreign Language Learning Strategies

There have been many past studies on language learning strategies. Seng et al. (2023) surveyed to explore the strategies employed by language learners throughout their language-learning journey. The participants were 132 undergraduates studying French as a third language at a public university in Malaysia. The results indicate that during the acquisition of the French language, the most used direct strategy was rehearsal, while critical thinking had the lowest mean scores. Additionally, the research highlights that the help-seeking strategy scored the highest mean, whereas the metacognitive self-regulation strategy scored the lowest. The study establishes a strong connection between direct strategies (including rehearsal, organization, elaboration, and critical thinking) and indirect strategies (metacognitive self-regulation and resource management) in the context of foreign language learning.

Abdullah et al (2023) explored the learning strategies employed by 107 undergraduates studying Japanese as a foreign language at a Malaysian university. The investigation focused on three key strategies: resource management, metacognitive self-regulation, and cognitive components. The results revealed a strong positive correlation among resource management, metacognitive self-regulation, and cognitive components. Thus, Japanese language educators are recommended to pay attention to how learners utilise language learning strategies and guide them in optimising learning outcomes through these crucial strategies.

In another research study, Zubbir et al (2023) looked at how students learn Japanese at a university in Malaysia. Their goal was to understand the strategies used by the students, focusing on the idea that learning is influenced by how students interact with their environment and how their environment affects their learning. This quantitative research conducted a survey distributed to 144 participants enrolled in a third-language Japanese course. The results showed that, in general, students reported employing strategies such as repetitive self-practice, memorizing keywords for concept recall, and reviewing class materials. The data also revealed a predominantly positive attitude among students regarding their metacognitive self-regulation. Additionally, students demonstrated a commitment to studying in a conducive environment and proactively sought assistance when needed.

To sum it up, the reviewed studies collectively contribute valuable insights into the diverse range of language learning strategies used by students in different linguistic contexts. In essence, these studies collectively emphasise the need for language educators to be aligned with the varied strategies used by students and to play an active role in guiding them toward effective learning approaches. The results highlight how various strategies are connected and can influence the outcome of language learning, providing a foundation for more targeted and supportive language instruction.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. This study is rooted in Wenden and Rubin's (1987) learning strategies. Firstly, learners use cognitive components such as (i) rehearsal, (ii) organisation, (iii) elaboration and (iv) critical thinking. Next, learners also use metacognitive self-regulation to maximise their learning. Finally, they use resource management strategies. According to Rahmat (2018), learners' behaviour is influenced by their environment. This means a positive environment will create a positive outcome and vice versa. Hence, resource management includes (i) environment management, (ii) effort management and (iii) help-seeking.

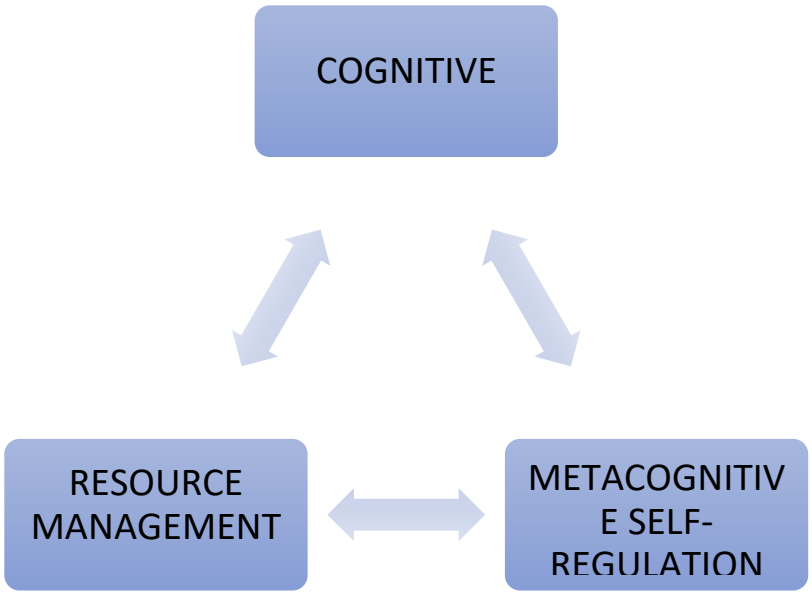

Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study-
Is there a Relationship between all Language Learning Strategies?

Methodology

This quantitative study explores the relationships between learning strategies used for learning the Japanese language among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 239 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey rooted in Wenden and Rubin (1987) to reveal the variables in Table 1 below. The survey has 4 sections. Section A has items on the demographic profile. Section B has 19 items on cognitive components. Section C has 11 items on metacognitive self-regulation. Section D has 11 items on resource management.

Table 1
Distribution of Items in the Survey
Wenden and Rubin (1987)

	STRATEGY (Wenden and Rubin, 1987)		SUB-STRATEGY	Item	Total
B	COGNITIVE COMPONENTS	(i)	Rehearsal	4	19
		(ii)	Organization	4	
		(iii)	Elaboration	6	
		(iv)	Critical Thinking	5	
C	METACOGNITIVE SELF-REGULATION				11
D	RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	(i)	Environment Management	5	11
		(ii)	Effort Management	4	
		(iii)	Help-Seeking	2	
					41

Table 2
Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.956	41

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach Alpha of .956, 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

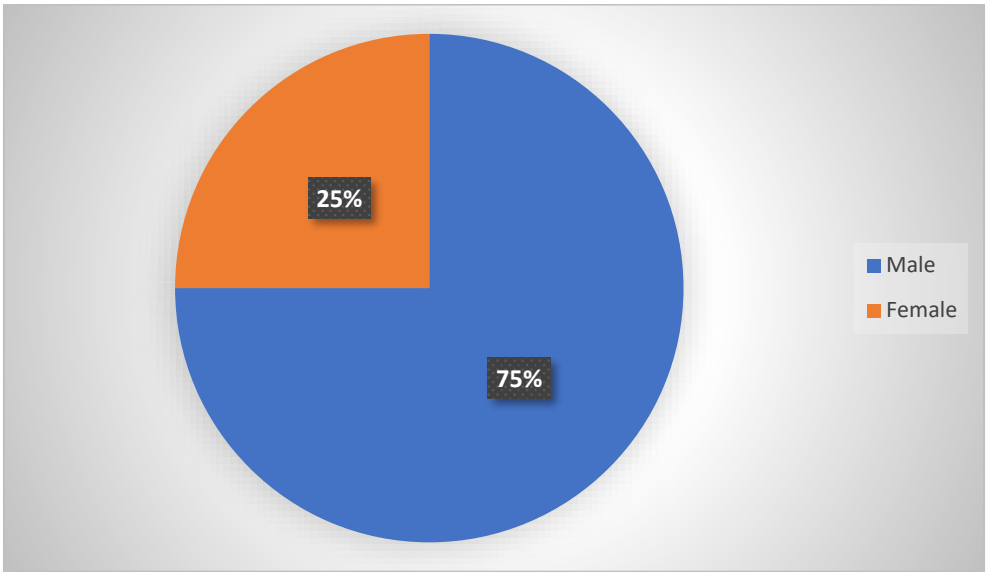

Figure 2 -Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 above, shows that 75% of the respondents were female and 25% were male.

Q2 Discipline

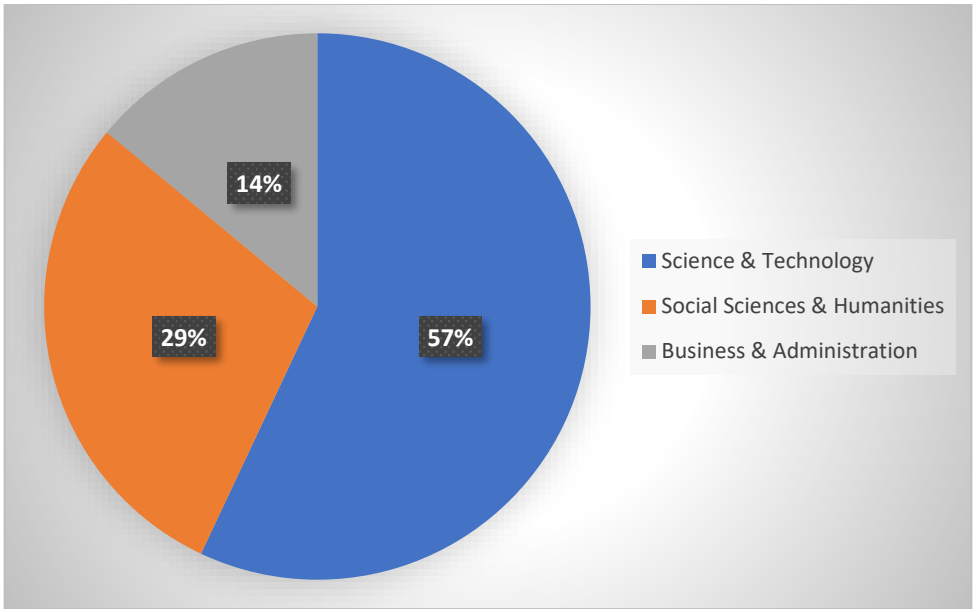

Figure 3 -Percentage for Discipline

Figure 3 above shows the distributions by discipline. 57% of the respondents were from Science and Technology, while 29% were from Social Science and Humanities. 14% of the students were from Business and Administration.

Q3-Level of Studies

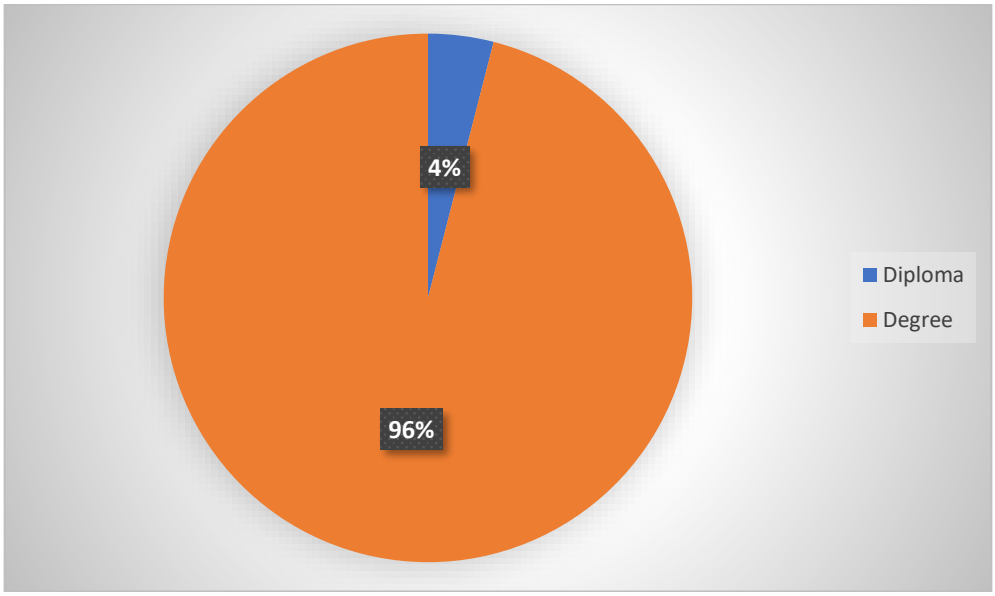

Figure 4 -Percentage of Studies

Figure 4 shows the distribution by level of studies. It shows that 96% of the respondents were from degree level, while 4% were from diploma level.

Q4 Level of Japanese

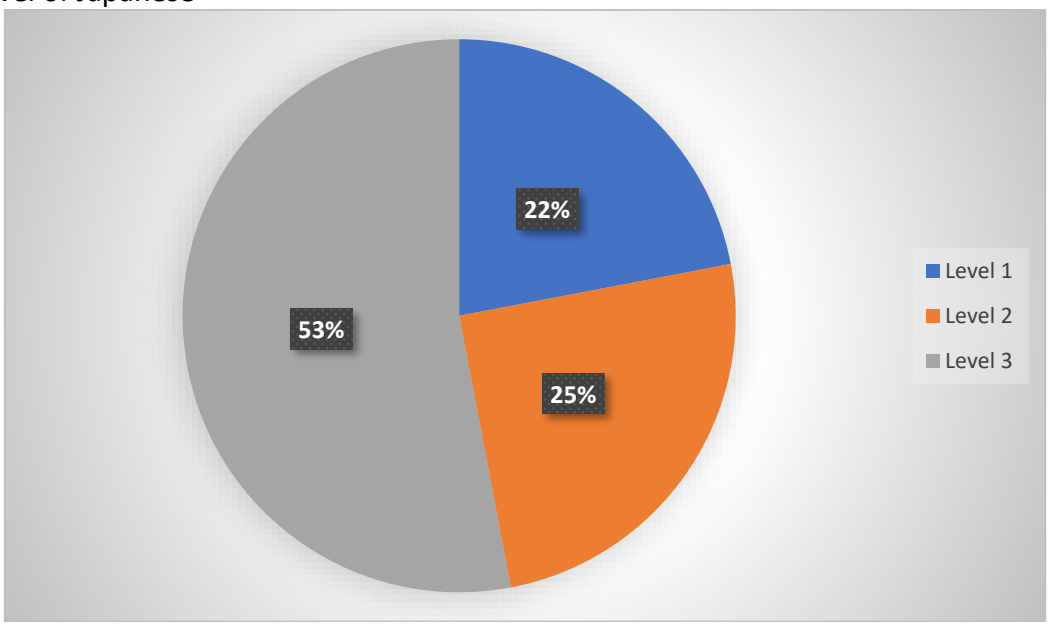

Figure 5 -Percentage for level of Japanese

Figure 5 shows the distribution by the level of Japanese language. 22% of the respondents were from the Japanese level 1, while 25% were from level 2, and 53% were from level 3.

Findings for Cognitive Components

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive their use of cognitive components in foreign language learning? In the context of this study, these components are measured by (i) rehearsal, (ii) organization, (iii) elaboration, and (iv) critical thinking.

(i) Rehearsal (4 items)

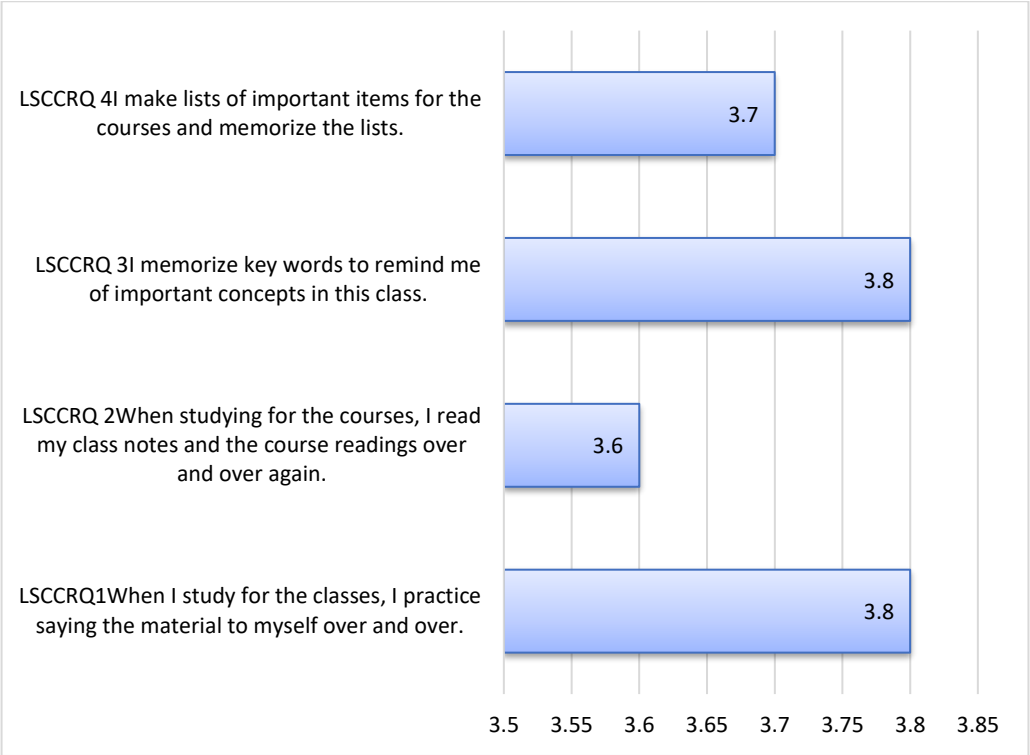

Figure 6 -Mean for Rehearsal

Figure 6 shows that students use different methods to remember and understand their study material. The highest scores (3.8) are for repeating information to themselves and memorizing keywords. Students also tend to review their class notes and readings repeatedly (3.6) and make lists to help remember important items (3.7). In summary, students employ a mix of verbal repetition and visual aids, demonstrating a varied approach to reinforcing their learning.

(ii) Organization (4 items)

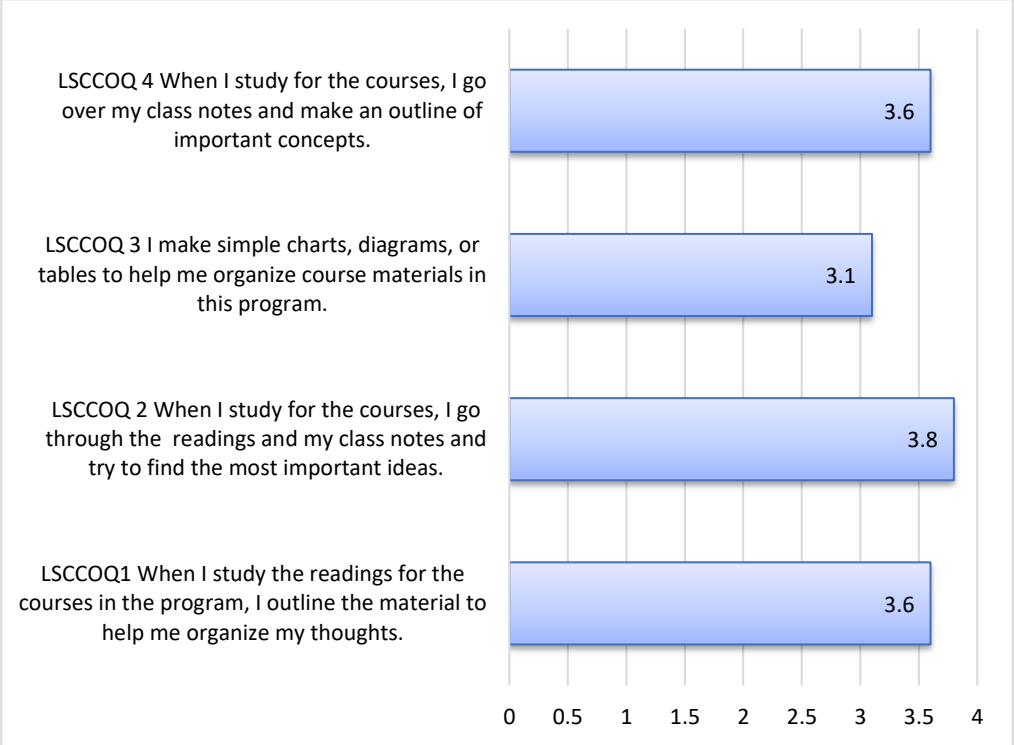

Figure 7 -Mean for Organization

Figure 7 displays the mean score for Organization as the sub-strategy of learning, encompassing all four items with scores ranging from 3.1 to 3.8. This indicates that respondents regularly employ organizational strategies in their language learning. Specifically, the item "When I study for the courses, I go through the readings and my class notes and try to find the most important ideas" achieved the highest mean score (3.8), followed by the item "When I study the readings for the courses in the program, I outline the material to help me organize my thoughts" (3.6) and the item "when I study for the courses, I go over my class notes and make an outline of important concepts" (3.6). The data suggests that respondents frequently engage in activities such as reviewing readings and class notes to identify crucial ideas, outlining material for thought organisation, and summarising important concepts. Conversely, the item "I make simple charts, diagrams, or tables to help me organize course materials in this program" obtained the lowest mean score (3.1), indicating that respondents occasionally utilise simple charts, diagrams, or tables to organize their course materials.

(iii) Elaboration (6 items)

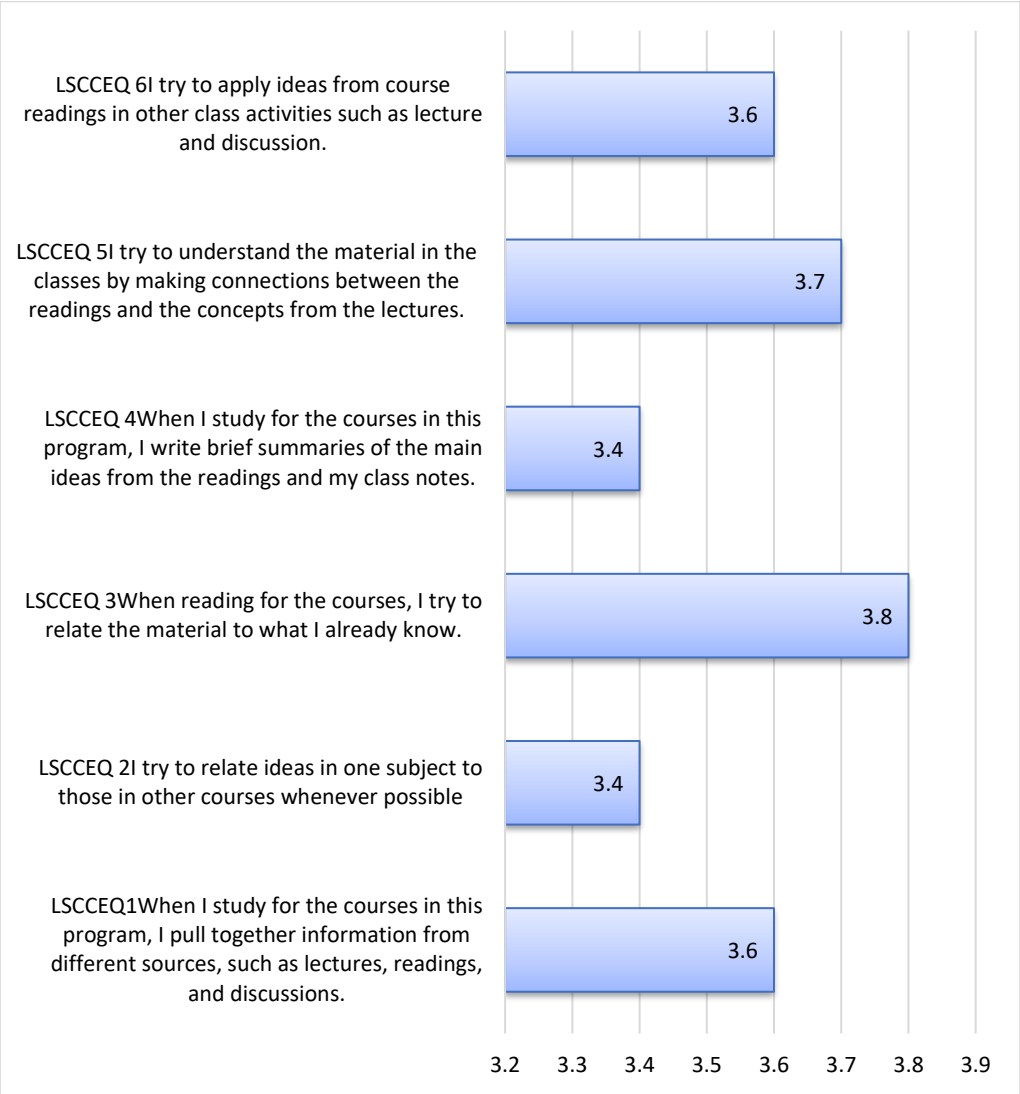

Figure 8 -Mean for Elaboration

Figure 8 displays the average scores for Elaboration across all six items, ranging from 3.4 to 3.8. This suggests that individuals consistently employ strategies to elaborate on their understanding in the context of learning the Japanese language. They are “When reading for the courses, I try to relate the material to what I already know” attained the highest mean score (3.8), followed by “I try to understand the material in the classes by making connections between the readings and the concepts from the lectures” (3.7), and “When I study for the courses in this program, I pull together information from different sources, such as lectures, readings, and discussions” (3.6) and “I try to apply ideas from course readings in other class activities such as lecture and discussion” (3.6). “I try to relate ideas in one subject to those in other courses whenever possible” and “When I study for the courses in this program, I write brief summaries of the main ideas from the readings and my class notes” received mean scores of 3.4. The data indicates that participants frequently try to establish connections with the materials used in their Japanese language classroom. Additionally, they gather information from diverse sources and apply concepts from course readings to various class activities. Furthermore, respondents adeptly summarise the key concepts from their readings and class notes.

(iv) Critical Thinking (5 items)

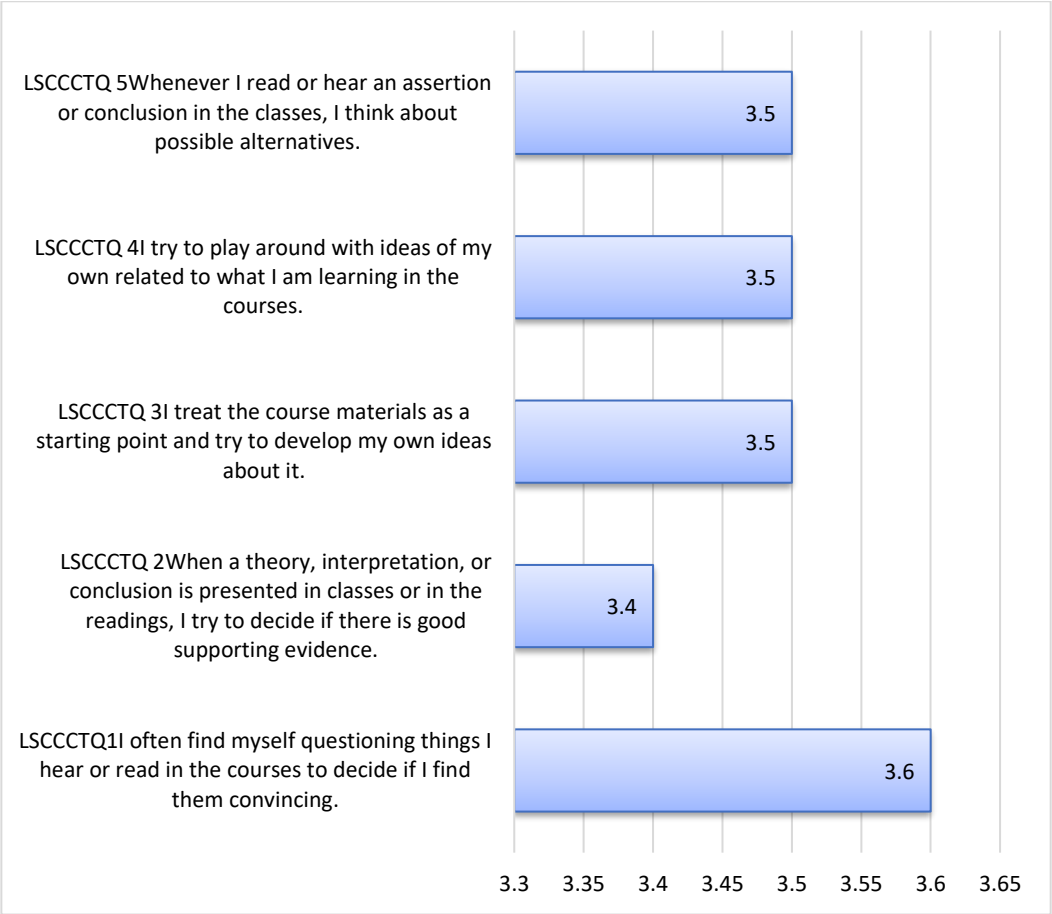

Figure 9 -Mean for Critical Thinking

In Figure 9, the average score for Critical Thinking is represented, considering all five items, with mean scores falling within the range of 3.4 to 3.6. This implies that learners actively engage in critical thinking during their language-learning strategies. In particular, “I often find myself questioning things I hear or read in the courses to decide if I find them convincing” showed the highest mean score (3.6). All the remaining items registered an identical mean score of 3.5 and the lowest mean score is 3.4. The data reveals that respondents frequently question the information they encounter in the course, assessing its persuasiveness.

Findings for Metacognitive Self-Regulation

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

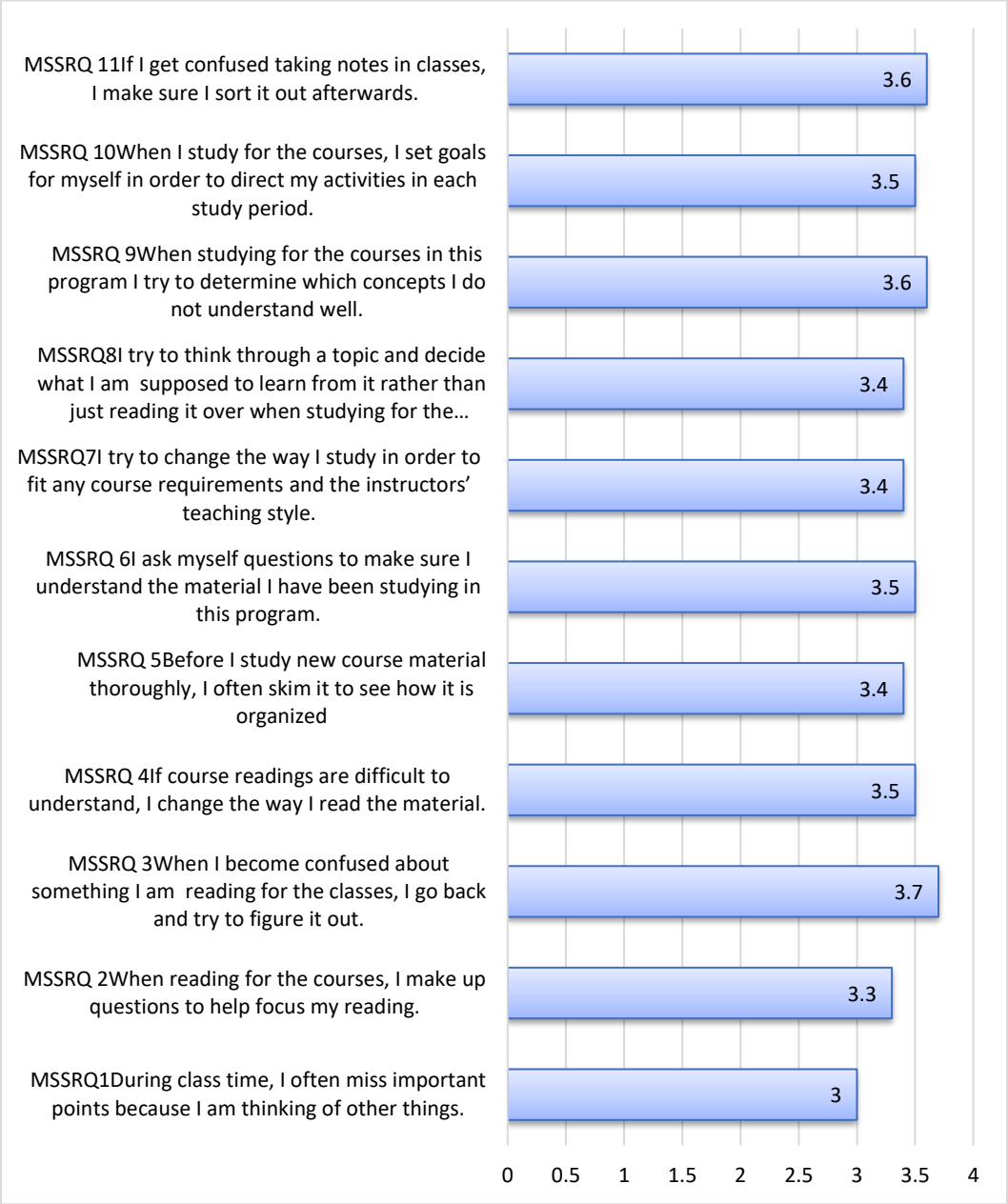

Figure 10 -Mean for Metacognitive Self-Regulation

Figure 10 shows the means of Metacognitive Self-Regulation. Based on all 11 items, the mean scores range from 3.0 to 3.7. This shows that the respondent perceives their use of metacognitive self-regulation in foreign language learning. The highest mean score of 3.7 is for the item where the respondents often went back and tried to figure it out when they became confused about something they were reading for the class. On the other hand, the item with the lowest mean score 3 is for the item where the respondents sometimes missed important points during class time, because they were thinking of other things.

Findings for Resource Management

This section presents data to answer research question 3- How do learners perceive their use of resource management in foreign language learning? In the context of this study, this is measured by (i) environment management, (ii) effort management, and (iii) help-seeking.

(i) Environment Management (5 items)

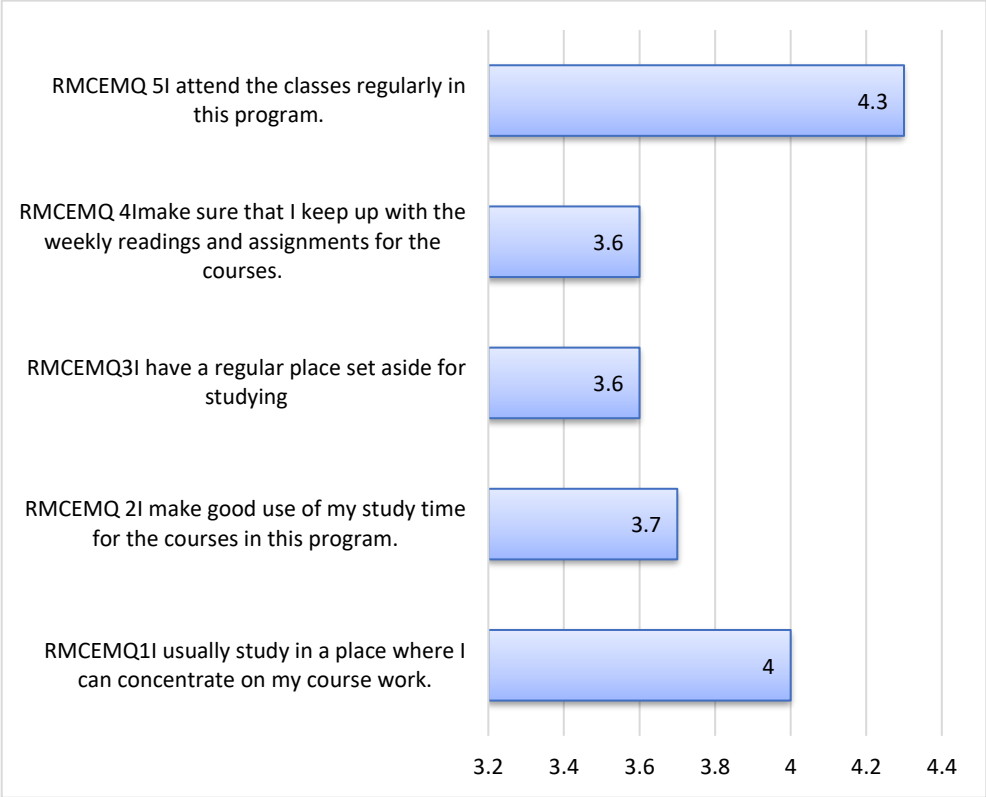

Figure 11 -Mean for Environment Management

Figure 11 demonstrates the distribution of environment management. The highest mean score (4.3) is for “I attend class regularly in this program” followed by a mean score (4) for “I usually study in a place where I can concentrate on my course work”. The mean score (3.7) is for “ I make good use of my study time for the courses in this program”. Meanwhile, “I make sure that I keep up with the weekly readings and the assignments for the courses” and “I have a regular place set aside for studying” shared a mean score of (3.6).

(ii) Effort Management (4 items)

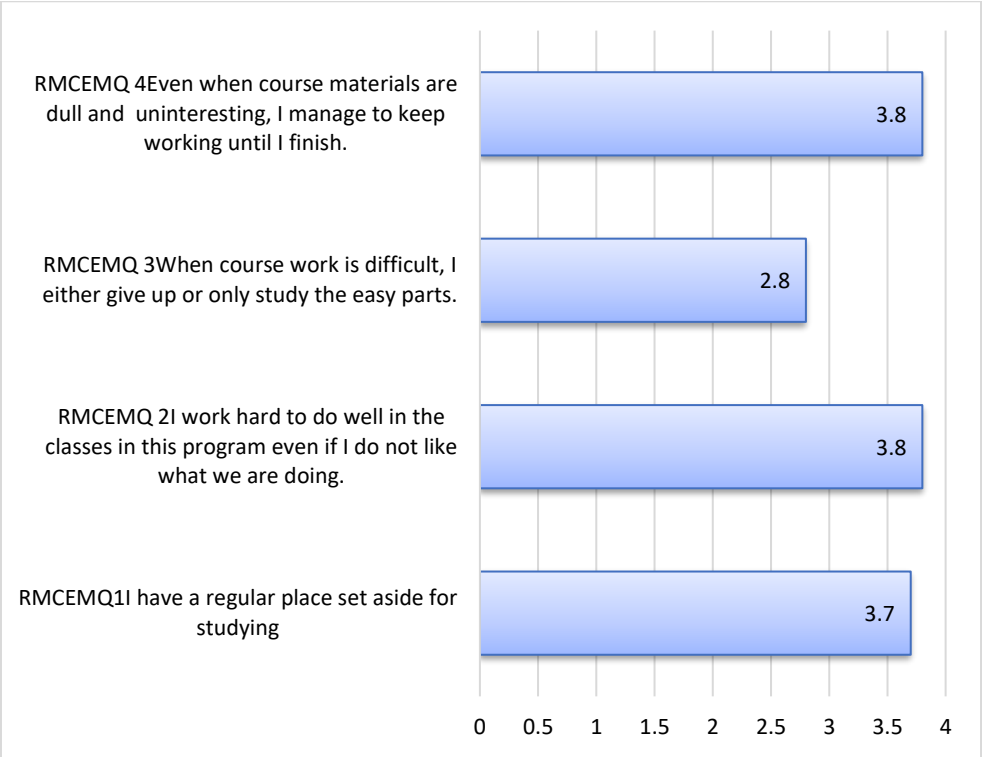

Figure 12 -Mean for Effort Management

Figure 12 above shows the Mean for Effort Management. The items "I work hard to do well in the classes in this program even if I do not like what we are doing" and "Even when course materials are dull and uninteresting, I manage to keep working until I finish" display the highest mean score of 3.8. The mean score of 3.7 is for "I have a regular place set aside for studying", while the lowest mean score 2.8 is for "When course work is difficult, I either give up or only study the easy parts."

(iii) Help-Seeking (2 items)

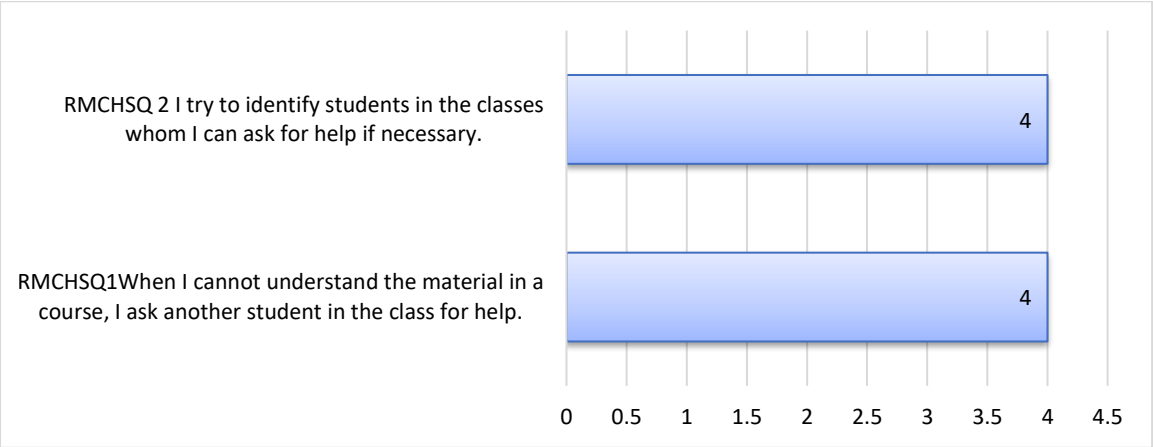

Figure 13 -Mean for Help-Seeking

Figure 13 above shows the Mean for Help-Seeking. Both two items in this component "When I cannot understand the material in a course, I ask another student in the class for help", and "I try to identify students in the classes whom I can ask for help if necessary" gain a mean score of 4.

Findings for Relationship between

This section presents data to answer research question 4- Is there a relationship between all learning components in foreign language learning? To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social and affective strategies data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 below.

Table 3

Corelation between Cognitive and Metacognitive Self-Regulation

Correlations

		COGNITIVE	METACOGNITIVE
COGNITIVE	Pearson Correlation	1	.766**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	239	239
METACOGNITIVE	Pearson Correlation	.766**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	239	239

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows there is an association between cognitive and metacognitive self-regulation. Correlation analysis shows that there is a highly significant association between cognitive and metacognitive self-regulation. (r=.766**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), the coefficient is significant at the .05 level and a positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that

there is also a strong positive relationship between cognitive and metacognitive self-regulation.

Table 4
Correlation between Metacognitive Self-Regulation and Resource Management

Correlations

		METACOGNITIVE	RESOURCEMANAGEMENT
METACOGNITIVE	Pearson Correlation	1	.660**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	239	239
RESOURCEMANAGEMENT	Pearson Correlation	.660**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	239	239

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows there is an association between metacognitive self-regulation and resource management. Correlation analysis shows that there is a highly significant association between metacognitive self-regulation and resource management (r=.660**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), the coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between metacognitive self-regulation and resource management.

Table 5
Correlation between Resource Management and Cognitive Components

Correlations

		RESOURCEMANAGEMENT	COGNITIVE
RESOURCEMANAGEMENT	Pearson Correlation	1	.642**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	239	239
COGNITIVE	Pearson Correlation	.642**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	239	239

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows there is an association between resource management and cognitive components. Correlation analysis shows that there is a highly significant association between resource management and cognitive components (r=.642**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), the coefficient is significant at the .05 level and a positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, a moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and a strong positive correlation from

0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between resource management and cognitive components.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

The results of this study demonstrated that there are strong associations between the three components: Cognitive component and Metacognitive Self-Regulation; Metacognitive Self-Regulation and Resource Management; and also between Resource Management and Cognitive component. The findings also revealed that overall, strategy usage was in the medium range. The strategies under the Resource Management strategy were marked the most significant and used the most by the students. They are the Environment-management strategy and Help-seeking strategy. Apart from learning various learning strategy taxonomies, it is also crucial to understand the relationship between the learning strategies. This study has shown that the learning strategy components are inter-related to each other and are equally important.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

It is no doubt that learning strategies are crucial in language learning. It is highly suggested that the strategy of metacognitive is being taught to students. Students need to understand how they learn and how specific strategies can help them to enhance their accuracy and ultimately efficiency. Furthermore, in the future, there is a need for more comprehensive research on a wide range of variables affecting language learning strategies employed by Japanese learners such as cultural background, motivation, attitude, gender, major of the studies, etc.

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