

Language Learning Strategies Employed by EFL Learners

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Abstract: *This study aimed to find out the most and the least frequently used strategies by high school students while learning English. This study was conducted with 48 students studying at Manara International School in Istanbul, Turkey in 2020-2021 academic year. A questionnaire was used in order to collect the data. The data was subjected to descriptive statistics through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings of the study showed that the most commonly used learning strategy was metacognitive strategy. More specifically, the findings revealed that most of students try to do their best to practice and use their English; they try to improve their weaknesses in the target language on noticing their mistakes in language production; they consciously listen to others to learn how those speakers use the target language; they try to find ways of becoming effective language learners; they arrange time for out of class work; they try to find someone so that they can speak in English, respectively. We found out that the least frequently used language learning strategy by the participants of the is the affective strategy. Based on this finding, we might conclude that the students do not know how to cope with anxiety-provoking situations.*

Keywords: learning English, EFL contexts, language learning strategies

1. Introduction

Learning pace in an English language learning classroom is different from learner to learner. That is, some students learn relatively fast while others may have a slow improvement (Robinson, 2002; Dorney & Skehen, 2003). One of the main elements that greatly contribute to this variation in language learning is the student's differences in the strategies that they employ to learn a foreign language (Ellis, 2004; Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003). Oxford (1990) illustrates that learning strategies are certain sets of actions and practices used by the students not only to facilitate their learning but also experience an enjoyable and effective learning process. On top of that, they help students take control of their own learning and learn swiftly even more competently (Rubin, 1975).

Language learning strategies (LLS) have played an influential role in language learning process. The improvement of learners' learning ability is considered crucial in the enhancement of the learning process; thus, students learning has gained the prominence focus in the second language acquisition since 1970s. Learning strategy has gained a tremendous attention, as per the main focus of language learning moved from teaching to learning (Flavell, 1971; Phakiti, 2003; Pei, 2014); in addition to that, some scholars have done several studies to investigate the connection between the learning strategy use and language learning development and reached a consensus that the use of language learning strategy plays a significant role in learning process (Rubin, 1987, O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

Language learning strategies are characterized as the student's styles and techniques to improve their own learning of English as a foreign language (Oxford, 1990). Furthermore, the utilization of students' language learning strategies is a common issue that affects students' English

language proficiency levels. Therefore, this investigation has focused on the identification of the most and the least frequently used strategies by language learners with the belief that sharing the findings of this research with the school teachers might lead to the establishment of explicit strategy training in schools for the improvement of English language teaching and learning. In addition, this study may provide useful insights for analyzing and evaluating educational programs with a close focus on the learner and broadening awareness regarding a variety of learning strategies.

2. Methodology

This study was designed as a quantitative study. Quantitative research method was used to collect and to analyze the data gathered from the students. The study was conducted at Manara International School in Istanbul, Turkey in 2020-2021 academic year. A total 48 high school students participated in the study. The students age range was 16 to 18. The students take 5 hours of English lessons per week at their school. The data of the study was collected using Inventory Strategy for Language Learners (SILL), originally developed by Oxford (1990) and later adopted by Tunkz (2003). The questionnaire consisted of 50 items. An Arabic version of the questionnaire was used in this study. Back translation method was used to translate the questionnaire items into Arabic. That is, a clear Arabic version was delivered to three English language teachers at the school for accuracy, and no notes or amendments were added to it because the Arabic version of the questionnaire was found to be clear. The questionnaire included six types of language learning strategies, which are Memory strategies (Items 1-9), Cognitive strategies (Items 10-23), Compensation strategies (Items 24-29), Metacognitive strategies (Items 30-38), Affective strategies (Items 39-44) and Social strategies (45-50). The questionnaire was distributed by the teachers in the class time in order to avoid any confusion, where they would

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explain the instructions and clarify any possible doubts. Furthermore, the questionnaires were collected upon completion. The data gathered from the questionnaire was subjected to the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software version 22 and the data was analysed by using descriptive analysis method.

3. Findings and Conclusions

As indicated in Figure 1 below, the findings revealed that the participants of the study use metacognitive strategies the most in the language learning process with a mean (M)

value of 3.60 and standard deviation (SD) of 0.95. This is followed by cognitive strategies with the mean (M) value of 3.44 and standard deviation (SD) of 0.85. Social Strategies with the mean (M) value of 3.38 and standard deviation (SD) of 1.16; Memory Strategies with the mean (M) value of 3.22 and standard deviation (SD) of 0.94 and Compensation Strategies with the mean (M) value of 3.085 and standard deviation (SD) of 0.97. Finally, we found out that the students use affective strategies with the mean (M) value of 3.068 and standard deviation (SD) of 1.05.

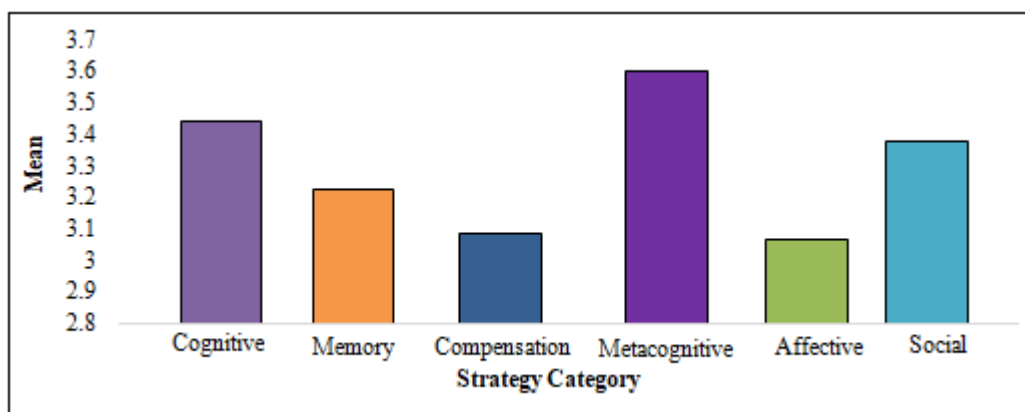


Figure 1: Findings about the Participants' Strategy Category Use

Drawing on the findings of the study, we may conclude that the participants of the study use metacognitive strategies the most in the language learning process. That is, most of the participants of the study try to do their best to use English; they try to improve their weaknesses in the target language on noticing their mistakes in language production; they consciously listen to others to learn how those speakers use the target language; they try to find ways of becoming effective language learners; they arrange time for out of class work; they try to find someone so that they can speak in English, respectively. Hence, we may conclude that the participants of the study try to take the control over their language learning by critically thinking about what they need to learn and how they learn it better. According to Lerner and Kline (2006), metacognitive strategies are used by competent students although those with some kind of learning disabilities may not be able to direct their learning. Nevertheless, learners with learning disabilities would be able to gain control over their own learning once they learn to use metacognitive strategies (Lerner & Kline 2006).

Secondly, we may conclude that the participants of the study use affective language learning strategies the least. Affective strategies have to do with managing positive and negative emotions while learning. Dealing with, especially, negative emotions, which are considered as barriers to learning and known as emotional-barriers, anxiety, for example, should be treated properly in order to create an emotionally safe environment in the classroom (Pekrum, Goetz & Perry, 2002). Students experience many different emotions over the course of a single lesson such as boredom, enjoyment, hope and anger that impact their learning in many ways (Pekrum, Goetz & Perry, 2002). This conclusion might indicate a need for explicit strategy training for those

students who neglect using affective strategies in the language learning process.

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