

*Investigating the Relationship
between Learner's Gender,
Proficiency and Language Learning
Strategies:
The Case of EFL Iraqi Learners*

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Abstract

Studying the use of language learning strategies in terms of learner's variables like proficiency and gender has been the focus of a growing body of research in an endeavour to find out any possible relation between them. The present study attempts to shed light on such a relationship as far as EFL Iraqi learners are concerned. For this purpose , Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (1990) is manipulated. The results which are based on the descriptive statistics indicate that the EFL Iraqi learners are medium strategy users. The most frequently used strategies are Metacognitive strategies and the least frequently used ones are Compensation strategies.. One way ANOVA Test shows that Learners with better EFL proficiency report using the overall strategy and each of the six categories of strategy significantly more frequently than learners with lower EFL proficiency do. The study reveals no significant gender differences among overall strategy use.

Introduction

Language learning strategies have drawn researchers' attention since 1960s. The interest in the learner's strategies was the result of a significant shift of focus in education, it was a shift of emphasis from methods of teaching to learner's characteristics and their efforts on learning (Lessard – Clouston, 1997). This change of focus in applied linguistics resulted in showing great emphasis on learners and learning believing that learning starts from the learner. According to Rubin (1987 : 15), there " *was a growing interest in defining how learners can take charge of their own learning and clarifying how teachers can help students become more autonomous*".

Consequently, research in applied linguistics has focused on what good language learners do while learning a target language (Rubin, 1987; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; and Oxford, 1994). The early studies were known as ***Good Language Learner*** studies, which have been developed into the present day studies in language learning strategies. Oxford and Ehrman (1995 : 362) point out such studies have repeatedly suggested that successful language learners tend to use strategies such as " *finding practice opportunities, guessing intelligently, using patterns, treating the language as a rule system, and communicating often in the language* ".

The impetus to conduct the present study can simply be summed in its attempt to answer three research questions through employing Oxford's ***Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL)*** (1990) :

1. What types of language learning strategies are frequently used by EFL Iraqi learners at the university level ?
2. What association, if any, exists between the types of language learning strategies and language proficiency among Iraqi EFL learners ?
3. Do males and females Iraqi EFL learners differ in their use of language learning strategies ?

Language Learning Strategies : Definition and Classification

A good starting point would better be discussing how the term ***strategy*** came to be so popularly associated with learning behaviours before attempting to define and classify language learning strategies. Although used by the vast majority of researchers, and especially the prominent ones like Rubin (1975); Bialystok (1978); O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990 and 1994), it is still raising some debate. Other terms used synonymously with the term strategy include

learning behaviours (Wesche, 1977; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985), tactics (Seliger, 1984) and techniques (Stern, 1992) (in Griffiths, 2004 : 1).

Strategy, from the ancient Greek term *strategia*, refers to generalship or the art of war. This term specifically implicates the best possible management of troops, ships or aircraft in a planned campaign (Chang, et al., 2007 : 237). From this etymological explanation, it can be seen that the term strategy implicates methods or techniques followed for the purpose of approaching or getting particular goals or a planned design for controlling and manipulating certain information (Brown, 2000 : 165). Hence, strategy involves the meanings of consciousness and intention. It is important to mention here that the term **strategy** has generally been used interchangeably with **tactics** in the early studies in this domain until Schemeck (1988 : 171) made a distinction between the two terms by drawing the attention to the dimension of ' specificity – generality '. So, he argued that " *the term tactics refers to the specific activities of learners and the word strategies to their more general plan or approach* ". From this it can be inferred that **strategy** is at a higher learning level than **tactics**, and the choice of tactics by a learner is guided by his / her own strategy.

Since the 1970s researchers have attempted to define, classify and list language learning strategies. The definition and classification of language learning strategies have been one of the fundamental problems that continued to be stressed in all the studies conducted to investigate the processes followed by different learners in learning second / foreign languages. As a result, the domain of language learning strategies research embodies a plethora of definitions shedding the light on these strategies from different perspectives. These studies even indicate the lack of consensus among researchers about the terminology used to describe these strategies. Here are a few definitions :

1. Bialystok (1978 : 71) : " ... " *language learning strategies* " ... are defined as optional means for exploiting available information to improve competence in a second language ", and in another place, " to increase the proficiency of second language learning " (p : 76).
2. Rubin (1987 : 23) : " *Learning strategies are strategies which contribute to development of the language system which the learner constructs and affects the learner directly* ".

3. Chamot (1987 : 71) : " *Learning strategies are techniques, approaches, or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information* " .
4. O'Malley and Chamot (1990 : 1) : " *... the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information* " .
5. Oxford (1990 : 8) : " *Learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self – directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations* " .
6. Oxford (1992 : 18) : " *language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval or use of the new language. Strategies are tools for the self – directed involvement necessary for developing communicative ability.*

Language learning strategies are described as optional means, techniques, approaches, deliberate actions, special thoughts or behaviours and specific actions. These descriptions go well with the definition set previously for the term strategy, and specially when the purpose and utility of language learning strategies are shown, since all the definitions emphasize the idea of the learner's consciousness and intention in using certain strategies so as to learn a foreign / second language. So, when learners manipulate certain techniques or methods without conscious awareness, they are far from being considered as strategies. Cohen (1995 : 3) seems to agree with this opinion since he believes " *if a learner's behaviour is totally unconscious so that the given learner is not able to identify any strategies associated with it, then the behaviour would simply be referred to as a process, not a strategy* ". Accordingly, Cohen distinguishes between the terms **strategy** and **process** depending on the principle of consciousness. Based on the definitions above, it can be said that language learning strategies are specific ways that language learners consciously / intentionally select and manipulate so as to learn the language properly and effectively.

Another term, viz. learning styles, has raised some sort of overlap with language learning strategies. The same rule of general – specific explained above with strategy – tactics terms is applicable here. Learning styles are " *the overall patterns that give direction to general behaviour* " (Cornett, 1983 : 9) (in Oxford, 2001 : 359), while learning strategies,

as obviously shown in the aforementioned definitions, are specific learning behaviours, processes, or activities adopted by the learners to enhance their learning. This indicates that learning styles form the general cluster according to which the learner identifies the suitable strategy that should be followed when attempting to learn language. Hence, Ehrman & Oxford (1989 : 1) indicate that learning strategies are more specific than styles ; and students use learning strategies that reflect their basic learning styles (p : 2).

Apart from this confusion between language learning strategies and other terms, it is time now to expose some characteristics of these strategies . Oxford (1986 : 33) summarizes her view of language learning strategies stating that they are important since they improve language performance, encourage learner autonomy, are teachable, and expand the role of the teacher in significant ways. Later, Oxford (1990 : 9) ; Lessard – Clouston (1997) and Salem (2006 : 28 – 29) add more features for language learning strategies since they believe language learning strategies :

1. are problem oriented.
2. involve many aspects, not just the cognitive.
3. are flexible.
4. are influenced by a variety of factors.

Based on the results of investigation, language learning strategies that the learners use during the act of grasping new information, processing it and performing task have been identified and classified by researchers although this is another problem that has its own share of debate and lack of consensus among them. Of these classification, only three have been regarded important in this domain. They are Rubin's (1987), O'Malley, et al's (1985 a and b), and Oxford (1990).

According to the plan of the study, Oxford's taxonomy is to be paid its due attention. Oxford and her colleagues' studies (Oxford (1986); Oxford and Crookall (1989); and Oxford (1990)) worked on and developed the strategy classification of O'Malley & Chamot and even expanded it to include new strategies. Following up her strategy approach, Oxford (1990) has developed instruments that systematically represent all the kinds of strategies she considers essential to language learning. Oxford (1986 : 31) classifies learning strategies into two basic classes : primary and support, which she later on changes to direct and indirect strategies respectively (Oxford and Crookall , 1989 : 404) , according to the way these strategies affect the learner's foreign / second language learning. These two classes are subdivided into a total of six

groups. She classifies memory, cognitive and compensation strategies as direct class and metacognitive, affective and social strategies as the indirect class.

Oxford (1990); Ehrman and Oxford (1990 : 312) and Oxford (2001 : 365) maintain that the nature and principles of these strategies can be as follows :

1. Direct language learning strategies

They are those behaviours that require a straightforward involvement in the target language. Each category classified under this label does this processing differently and for different objectives . These categories involve :

- *Memory strategies* : they are techniques that facilitate the process of recalling new input. These strategies help the learners store new information and skills in memory so as to retrieve them later whenever they are needed.

Memory strategies comprise four sets of learning strategies; creating mental linkages (covering grouping, associating / elaborating; and placing new words into a context); applying images and sounds (including using imagery; semantic mapping; using keywords; and representing sounds in memory); reviewing well (structured reviewing); and employing action (involving using physical response or sensation and using mechanical techniques).

- *Cognitive strategies* : they involve manipulation and transformation of the language in some direct ways for processing language input and preparing for language output. Cognitive strategies are very essential since they deal with the actual processes involved in manipulating the language for reception and production of meaning. Because this type of direct strategies allow the learners to better comprehend and produce language properly, they are considered the most popular strategies among language learners and they are included in all the systems of classifying language learning strategies.

Cognitive strategies are built up of four sets of learning strategies; practicing (including repeating; formally practicing with sounds and writing systems; recognizing and using formulas and patterns; recombining; and practicing naturalistically); receiving and sending messages (involving getting the idea quickly and using resources for receiving and sending messages); analyzing and reasoning (implicating reasoning deductively; analyzing expressions; analyzing contrastively across languages; translating; and transferring); and creating structure

for input and output (covering taking notes; summarizing; and highlighting).

- *Compensation strategies* : they are behaviours that help learners overcome any gaps in knowledge of the target language. Implementing these strategies allow the learners to use certain skills to compensate their lack of other skills for the purpose of being able to comprehend the input or to express ideas. Language learners, for instance, may make use of their syntactic knowledge to compensate for their phonological knowledge.

Compensation strategies are classified into the strategies of guessing intelligently depending on different types of clues like the linguistic ones and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing (including switching to the mother tongue; getting help from others; using mime or gestures; avoiding communication partially or wholly; selecting the topic; adjusting or approximating the message; coining words; and using a circumlocution or synonym). These strategies are commonly manipulated for the skills of listening comprehension, reading comprehension, speaking and writing activities and vocabulary learning.

2. Indirect language learning strategies

They are those behaviours that support the language learning process though they are indirectly involved in it. Nevertheless, they are essential for effective language learning. This fact would become clear when examining their types and the roles they perform in language learning. Indirect language learning strategies are classified into :

- *Metacognitive strategies* : They are described as the " beyond – the – cognitive " strategies since they are used to provide " executive control " over the learning process. By possessing these strategies, the learners would be able to determine their learning objectives. monitor their understanding about materials being learned and evaluate what they have learned and how well they have done it (Wenden, 1999 : 436).

Metacognitive strategies are divided into centering the learning, arranging and planning the learning and evaluating the learning. Centering strategies comprise three subsets of strategies that deal with behaviours which focus the learners' attention on the materials that they are going to learn and the ones they have learned. Arranging and planning strategies guide the learners to set their learning goals, organize and plan their learning activities in an efficient and effective ways, and seek the opportunities to practice the target language especially in genuine situations. Finally, evaluation strategies facilitate the learners to

monitor the ongoing learning process and to evaluate the progress of learning the target language. Oxford's evaluation learning strategies cover the meanings of self – monitoring and self – evaluation.

- *Affective strategies* : are those employed for controlling emotions, attitudes and motivation that influence the success or failure of language learning process. Affective strategies are very important in language learning because they may help learners control their emotions, possess positive attitudes towards the language they are learning and generate strong motivation (Wenden, 1987 : 10).

Three groups of learning strategies are included under the label affective language learning strategies. They are; lowering anxiety strategies, which implicate following certain ways for making the learning process to be in a relaxed situation and conditions such as practicing relaxation exercises, taking deep breath, listening to music, ... etc.; encouraging strategies, which lead the learners to have more confident and risks in language learning so that they would not be afraid of making mistakes; and taking emotional temperature strategies that help the learners discern negatives attitudes and emotions.

- *Social strategies* : These strategies implicate engaging in interactions the learner with other people in the language learning process. Those people can be learners, EFL teachers, or native speakers of the target language. Social strategies are based on the principle that learning is a social event, and this is largely applicable to learning language.

Social strategies cover three sets of learning strategies: asking question, cooperating and empathizing with others. Asking question strategies are very useful to learners to clarify the materials that they do not understand or to verify the materials for checking their correctness. Cooperative strategies, on their part, facilitate language learning process in peers or groups cooperatively through which each learners is held accountable for his / her own learning and is motivated to reinforce the principle of learning with others. Lastly, empathizing strategies aid learners to increase their ability to empathize by developing cultural understanding and becoming aware of the others' thoughts and feelings.

The three taxonomies presented above expose some sort of similarity in the system of classification followed and the terminology followed, in spite of the fact each one expands the taxonomy that precedes it by adding new strategies. Oxford's taxonomy is going to be manipulated in the present study since it is regarded to be the most

comprehensive classification of date, according to Ellis (1994 : 539) and Alptekin (2007 : 4).

Language Learning Strategies and Learner's Variables : Proficiency and Gender

Oxford and Nyikos (1989 : 291) observe that employing the appropriate learning strategies would enable learners to be responsible for their own learning by encouraging learner autonomy, independence, and self – direction. However, Foreign language learners' strategy choices are not automatic but determined by various factors which are both external and internal to them (Ehrman and Oxford, 1989 : 1). The internal factors that usually affect learners' strategy choices are their personality types and level of motivation. The external factors, on the other hand, comprise the physical characteristics of learners such as age, gender and language proficiency. Furthermore, Yang (2007 : 42) indicates that strategies used by different learners vary according to different factors, such as degree of awareness, stage of learning, task requirements, teacher expectations, age, gender, nationality/ethnicity, general learning style, personality traits, motivation level, learners' beliefs, and purpose for learning the language. The present study aims at investigating the effect of both of learners' gender and language proficiency on selecting the appropriate language learning strategies.

Gender has been found out to be the most important variable that affect foreign language learning. Differences between males and females in language learning strategy use are more prevalent and important than previously thought by researchers. Hence, studies carried out in this domain have shown a strong relationship between the two. Politzer's study (1983) can be cited as one of the early studies that discovered gender differences in language learning strategy use (in Ehrman and Oxford, 1989 : 1). The findings of Politzer's study reveal that female students tend to use social strategies significantly more than male students. Although Politzer seems to believe that this finding is of minor importance, other researchers consider it very significant since it may largely contribute to understanding how males and females go about learning a foreign / second language. Ehrman and Oxford (1989 : 2) report that social learning strategies are more important in the process of language learning than the other strategies since they help the learner be exposed to the foreign language, increase the chances of communication with the native speakers, and enhance learner's motivation. Moreover, Green and Oxford (1995 : 266) indicate that females use more strategies and more frequently than males. In their study of adult

language learners, Ehrman and Oxford (1989 : 1) also find out that females, compared to males, report significantly greater use of four categories of language learning strategies; general study strategies, functional practice strategies, strategies for searching and communicating meaning and self – management strategies. Other studies that confirm such finding are (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989 : 296 ; Lee and Oxford, 2008 : 8 – 9 ; Tercanlioglu (2004) and Lee and Oxford (2008 : 23)).

As far as the relationship between the learner's language proficiency and his / her language learning strategy choice is concerned, various studies have been carried out to find out whether it is possible for such a relationship to exist. Wu (2008 : 86) finds out that higher proficiency EFL students use language learning strategies more often than lower proficiency EFL students. Furthermore, compared to lower proficiency EFL students, higher proficiency EFL students use cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies more often. Similarly, Chamot (2004 : 20) and Sue (2005 : 54) assert that high proficiency learners know how to use appropriate strategies to reach their learning goals, while low proficiency learners are less expert in their strategy use and choice. O'Malley, et al. (1985a : 23) maintain that successful language learners use a wide range of metacognitive strategies (that is strategies employed by learners to manage their own learning), leading the researchers to conclude that the more successful learners are probably able to exercise greater metacognitive control over their learning. MacIntyre (1994 : 185) also indicated that second language learners may use strategies that make their communication more effective, informative and persuasive when they attain certain proficiency. Green & Oxford (1995 : 265) explain that "*students who were better in their language performance generally reported higher levels of overall strategy use and frequent use of a greater number of strategy categories.*" Yang (1994) states that perceived proficiency levels have a significant effect on learners' use of learning strategies. The better learners perceive their language proficiency, the more often they use various learning strategies to assist them in learning English (in Yang, 2007 : 52). It seems that language proficiency is commonly recognized as a determinant of strategy use by more and more studies. However, other studies concluded that there is no difference in the kind of learning strategies used by the successful learners and the unsuccessful ones, but the difference lays in the degree of flexibility the unsuccessful learners

expose when choosing strategies, and how appropriately such strategies are applicable to the given situation or learning task. This has raised the debate of causality between researchers. MacIntyre (1994 : 188) explicates that " *this might be interpreted to mean that either proficiency influences the choice of strategies or that strategy choice is simply a sign of proficiency level* ". Yet, in answer to his question as to whether strategy use results from or leads to increased proficiency, MacIntyre (1994 : 189) says " *the answer, undoubtedly, is BOTH* ".

Methodology

Participants

The subjects are (83) Iraqi advanced students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The 83 students (38 males and 45 females) are students in second, third and fourth stages / College of Education, University of Basra. Their ages range from nineteen to twenty for second stage students , twenty to twenty – one for third stage students, and twenty-one to twenty – two for fourth stage students. Table (1) shows the exact numbers of students at each stage.

Table (1) : Distribution of Subjects by Gender and Stage

Sex \ Stage	Males	Females	Total
Second stage	8	15	23
Third stage	15	15	30
Fourth stage	15	15	30
Total	38	45	83

Two criteria are taken into consideration as a measure of the participants' language proficiency; their level of learning (i.e., sophomore, junior and senior) as well as the scores they obtained in the final exams of the variable courses they study whether linguistic courses or literary ones. The names of the participants are kept anonymous in the current study. Table (2) exposes the distribution of the respondents according to these variables.

Table (2) : Distribution of Subjects by Gender , Stage and Proficiency

Stage \ Sex	High proficiency		Low proficiency		Total
	Females	Males	Females	Males	
Second stage	8	3	7	5	23
Third stage	8	5	7	10	30
Fourth stage	8	9	7	6	30
Total	24	17	21	21	83

Instrument

The tool used in the data collection is Oxford's Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0 for speakers of other languages learning English (ESL/EFL) (1990) (Table 5).It is a self - reporting questionnaire that contains 50 short statements, each of which describes the use of one strategy .Out of the 50 items of the original copy, two statements were omitted which are (46 and 48 items) since they do not fit the EFL Iraqi learners situation.

The scale statements are grouped into six categories according to Oxford's strategy system described earlier in this study : memory strategies (items 1 to 9), cognitive strategies (items 10 to 23), compensation strategies (items 24 to 29), metacognitive strategies (items 30 to 38), affective strategies (items 39 to 44), and social strategies (45 to 48). Subjects have to respond to each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5.The number indicates how often the learner uses the strategies:

- Never or almost never true of me 1
- Generally not true of me 2
- Somewhat true of me 3
- Generally true of me 4
- Always or almost always true of me 5

Data Collection

To conduct the study, sufficient copies of questionnaires were handed to the participants in their respective classes in April 2008, and they were told about the purpose of the study. As the questionnaire was worded in very simple English , it was not translated into Arabic. Moreover , the students were allowed to ask for any clarification they

might need including the meaning of some words or statements that they didn't understand . Very few questions were raised from the students. These subjects were given enough time to finish the questionnaire. On average, the students completed their responses within 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

The statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Microsoft Windows 11 is used to complete the analysis of the collected data. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, are implemented to answer the research questions. The statistical test used to identify any significant variation and to determine whether there are any significant relationships exist among respondents in the use of language learning strategies regarding their background characteristics is the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) .In addition, the significance level of statistics is set at $p < 0.05$ for the test in the present study.

Results & Discussion

Language Learning Strategies :Research First Question

What types of language learning strategies are frequently used by EFL Iraqi learners at the university level ?

The result indicates that the mean score of the participants' language learning strategy use is (٣.٤٧١), medium use and SD is (0.375).The mean scores of the six categories of learning strategies used by EFL Iraqi learners are reported in Table (3) in detail, where it can be seen that all means fell between 2.5 and 3.4 on a scale of 1 to 5 out a possible 5,except in the fourth category (metacognitive strategies) , the mean is (4.02) which is not that high the other categories where in a range which Oxford (1990) defines as medium use. Thus, the subjects in this study used strategies at a medium level rather than a high level.

Table (3) : Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the SILL

SILL Categories	Mean	SD	Degree
Memory Strategies	3.15	0.60	Medium
Cognitive Strategies	3.42	0.25	Medium
Compensation Strategies	2.99	0.68	Medium
Metacognitive Strategies	4.02	0.33	High
Affective Strategies	3.39	0.59	Medium
Social Strategies	3.47	0.02	Medium

Congruent with the previous studies finding (Abu Shmais, 2003 ; Chang, 2005; and Sarioban and Saricaoglu,2008), it is shown that the most frequently used strategy type is the metacognitive; the strategies that involve learning language through autonomous self-management of time and learning process (as shown in Table 3). This type of strategies deals mainly with behaviours which focus the learners' attention on the materials that they are going to learn and the ones they have learned. Also it helps learners to get improvement through completing tasks with plans and examining what had been done. It is followed by social strategies , contradicting the common belief that Asian students generally resist using participation in social interaction as a means to learn their second or foreign language (as in Lee ,2003: 25),then come cognitive strategies, affective strategies, memory strategies and finally compensation strategies with the lowest mean (M=2.99). It can be noticed that the students' use of direct strategies is relatively lower than the indirect ones.

Table (4) : Correlation Analysis among the SILL Categories

	MEMORY	COGNI	COMP	METACO	AFFECT	SOCIAL
MEMORY	1.0000					
COGNI	.3585	1.0000				
COMP	.1429	.2446	1.0000			
METACO	.2189	.5412	.2601	1.0000		
AFFECT	.3977	.3635	.2001	.2703	1.0000	
SOCIAL	.2501	.4387	.2025	.4539	.2929	1.0000

The relationship between the six categories of language learning strategies is shown in Table (4). The six categories are related to each other in a moderate to a strong fashion. Table (5) shows that the strongest significant relationship is between metacognitive and cognitive strategies (r = .5412). Next, social strategies are more strongly related to metacognitive strategies (r = .45) .This result may indicate that the more memory strategies the students use, the more metacognitive and cognitive strategies and the less affective strategies they reportedly manipulate. The weakest relationship is between compensation strategies (r = .142) and memory strategies.

To have an understanding of strategy use at the item level and to enhance factor analysis, descriptive statistics for each questionnaire

item are also calculated. The mean and standard deviation of each questionnaire item are calculated as shown below in Table (5) .

Table (5) : The Mean and S.D of Strategy Use at the Item Level
Part One: Memory Strategies

No	Item	Mean	S.D
1	I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	3.542	0.94
2	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	3.722	0.966
3	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word	2.963	1.273
4	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	.4573	1.015
5	I use rhymes to remember new English words.	2.409	1.297
6	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	2.132	1.217
7	I physically act out new English words.	2.662	1.327
8	I review English lessons often.	3.722	1.003
9	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	3.759	1.225

Part Two: Cognitive Strategies

No	item	Mean	S.D
10	I say or write new English words several times.	3.951	1.157
11	I try to talk like native English speakers.	.0123	956..0
12	I practise the sounds of English.	7.463	1.187
13	I use the English words I know in different ways.	3.674	1.269
14	I start conversations in English.	3.445	1.191
15	I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.	3.495	1.079
16	I read for pleasure in English.	3.349	1.329
17	I write notes, messages, letters or reports in English.	3.410	1.018
18	I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	3.419	10270
19	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	3.361	1.330
20	I try to find patterns in English.	3.132	1.033
21	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	3.373	1.358
22	I try not to translate word-for-word.	3.096	1.274
23	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	3.771	1.062

Part Three: Compensation Strategies

No	item	mean	S.D
24	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	3.000	1.249
25	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	3.120	1.243
26	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	2.686	1.447
27	I read English without looking up every new word.	2.108	1.239
28	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	2.831	1.286
29	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	4.192	1.005

Part Four : Metacognitive Strategies

No.	item	mean	S.D
30	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	3.988	9430.
31	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	4.241	9820.
32	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	4.554	7530.
33	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	4.349	0.861
34	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	3.602	1.058
35	I look for people I can talk to in English.	3.686	1.136
36	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	3.710	1.099
37	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	3.867	0.959
38	I think about my progress in learning English.	4.192	1.064

Part Five: Affective Strategies

No.	item	mean	S.D
39	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	3.891	1.082
40	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	4.084	0.977
41	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	3.421	1.240
42	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	2.988	1.401
43	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	2.469	1.309
44	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	3.506	1.213

Part Six: Social Strategies

No	item	mean	S.D
45	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	3.439	1.016
46	I practise English with other students.	3.494	1.223
47	I ask questions in English.	3.474	1.048
48	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3.474	1.083

In this study, it is particularly interesting to find that memorization is one of the least frequently used strategies among the (83)students. This indicates that the students significantly spend more time regulating and managing their learning than storing and recalling.

Tables (6 and 7) show the differences in the mean, S.D and Std. Error of Mean scores among the second, third and fourth year students. All of them have similar scores of means .There is no evidence that a specific group shows higher strategy use in all the six categories.

Table (6) : Mean , S.D and Std. Error of Mean of SILL by Stage Level

Stage	Mean	S.D	Std. Error of Mean
Second stage	3.455	0.686	0.099
Third stage	3.510	0.575	0.088
Fourth stage	3.472	0.613	0.083

Table (7) : Mean and S.D of SILL Categories by Stage Level

SILL Categories	Second stage		Third stage		Fourth stage	
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
Memory Strategies	2.995	0.736	3.149	0.624	3.007	0.754
Cognitive Strategies	3.602	0.375	3.597	0.299	3.60	0.355
Compensation Strategies	2.992	0.745	2.990	0.686	2.950	0.558
Metacognitive Strategies	4.033	0.460	4.044	0.362	4.088	0.272
Affective Strategies	3.188	0.870	3.443	0,652	3.311	0.558
Social Strategies	3.771	0.371	3.695	0.183	3.707	0.222

Proficiency and Language Learning Strategies :Research Second Question

What association, if any, exists between the types of language learning strategies and language proficiency among EFL Iraqi learners ?

To investigate whether or not , good language learners used strategies more frequently than less proficient learners, the students were divided into two levels of EFL proficiency as it is shown in the table below:

Table (8) : Mean and S.D of SILL Categories according to Proficiency

SILL Categories	High Proficiency(41)		Low Proficiency(42)	
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
Memory Strategies	3.222	0.613	3.093	0.644
Cognitive Strategies	3.740	0.393	3.476	0.243
Compensation Strategies	3.166	0.763	2.840	0.625
Metacognitive Strategies	4.143	0.364	3.918	0.316
Affective Strategies	3.412	0.759	3.377	0.476
Social Strategies	3.664	0.229	3.722	0.154

It is clear that the high proficiency students use metacognitive and cognitive strategies much more frequently than do the low proficiency students. Similar to Lee's (2003 : 22) results that the relationship between learning strategies and the proficiency is linear (the higher the students' proficiency, the more they report using all six categories of learning strategies).

More precisely, one way ANOVA test is conducted to discover the differences on the use of language learning strategies between students with higher proficiency and those with lower proficiency. According to the results, there is no significant difference in the use of strategies between students with higher proficiency and lower proficiency except on cognitive and compensation strategies (Table 9) .

Table (9) : SILL Correlation with Proficiency (high and low)

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
MEMORY	Between Groups	.340	1	.340	1.320	.254
	Within Groups	20.838	81	.257		
	Total	21.178	82			
COGNI	Between Groups	1.440	1	1.440	5.156	.026
	Within Groups	22.627	81	.279		
	Total	24.067	82			
COMP	Between Groups	2.189	1	2.189	6.209	.015
	Within Groups	28.553	81	.353		
	Total	30.742	82			
METAGO	Between Groups	1.041	1	1.041	3.327	.072
	Within Groups	25.341	81	.313		
	Total	26.382	82			
AFFECT	Between Groups	.018	1	.018	.050	.824
	Within Groups	28.767	81	.355		
	Total	28.785	82			
SOCIAL	Between Groups	.069	1	.069	.171	.680
	Within Groups	32.562	81	.402		
	Total	32.631	82			

Gender and Language Learning Strategies : Research Third

Question

Do males and females EFL Iraqi learners differ in their use of language learning strategies ?

To determine whether or not there is a difference in the use of learning strategies between male and female students , the one way ANOVA test is employed .The results show that females use all the six groups of strategies more frequently than their counterparts and the three most preferred strategies of males and females are metacognitive ,social and cognitive strategies.

Table (10) : Mean and S.D of SILL Categories according to learners' gender

SILL Categories	Females(45)		Males(38)	
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
Memory Strategies	3.190	0.562	3.175	0.544
Cognitive Strategies	3.677	0.330	3.501	0.300
Compensation Strategies	2.988	0.763	2.991	0.683
Metacognitive Strategies	4.081	0.404	3.950	0.306
Affective Strategies	3.374	0.606	3.416	0.587
Social Strategies	3.705	0.254	3.684	0.111

Table (11) : SILL Correlation with Gender

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
MEMORY	Between Groups	.037	1	.037	.140	.709
	Within Groups	21.142	81	.261		
	Total	21.178	82			
COGNI	Between Groups	.637	1	.637	2.204	.142
	Within Groups	23.430	81	.289		
	Total	24.067	82			
COMP	Between Groups	.000	1	.000	.000	.986
	Within Groups	30.742	81	.380		
	Total	30.742	82			
METAGO	Between Groups	.355	1	.355	1.104	.297
	Within Groups	26.027	81	.321		
	Total	26.382	82			
AFFECT	Between Groups	.029	1	.029	.081	.777
	Within Groups	28.756	81	.355		
	Total	28.785	82			
SOCIAL	Between Groups	.009	1	.009	.023	.879
	Within Groups	32.622	81	.403		
	Total	32.631	82			

As shown in Table (11), there is no significant difference in the use of language learning strategies, including memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social strategies, between male and female participants in this survey at the significance level of (0.05).

Conclusions

As far as the application of the inventory of the learning strategies is concerned, it is found out that the most frequently used strategy is the evaluating and planning (metacognitive)strategy, which involves learning language through autonomous self-management of time and learning process. Following evaluating strategy is the social strategy, which requires learners to actively interact with the others. Compensation strategy and memory strategy are found to be less frequently used by EFL Iraqi learners. Especially, compensation strategy is found to be the least frequent one.

The consistent findings regarding Memory strategies use across the studies surveyed indicate that different subjects seem to believe that Memory strategies can be powerful contributors to language learning. The low frequency use of Memory strategy by university students may indicate that beyond elementary levels of language learning, students simply do not use this strategy very much, or that students are not aware of how often they actually do employ them. The high frequency use of Metacognitive strategies seems to prove that those strategies are

essential for successful language learning since they provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process and keep them on the right track of learning which is crucial in a poor target language input environment such as in Iraq.

The current research statistically reveals that the higher learning EFL proficiency, the more frequent use of EFL learning strategies, and the lower EFL proficiency, the less frequent use of EFL learning strategies. This may indicate that the low proficiency EFL learners report insufficient strategy use. This finding is consistent with some of the previous SILL research findings such as the studies by (YU, 2003; Liu, 2004; and Chang, 2005), which further show that learners with higher foreign language learning proficiency across cultures may use a wider variety of strategies more frequently

Regarding the third question of the current study , it is found that there is no significant differences between male and female EFL Iraqi learners in their use of all the six categories. It is clear in comparing the means and S.D of each group that there are differences in favor of the females who record high scores than the males. This finding may indicate that the females in this study may know how to control their emotions during learning better than their male counterpart, which may also reflect females' emotional side in real life.

To summarize, the results of the study will, therefore, provide valuable base-line data about the current EFL strategy used by college English students. The study also presents a wealth of information on the role of gender and proficiency on learning strategy use. However, it, no matter how carefully conducted, cannot be taken as conclusive. It is only with repeated investigation that the complexities of an area can be truly appreciated and comprehended.

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