Language Learning Strategies of High-Achieving Libyan EFL Undergraduates in Gasser Bin Ghesheer Faculty of Education

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ABSTRACT

Successful language learning correlates with applying successful learning strategies. Therefore, this quantitative research explores the language learning strategies employed by high-achieving Libyan EFL undergraduates in the faculty of education in Gasser Bin Ghesheer. The data collection instruments are; a background questionnaire and STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (SILL) questionnaire developed by Oxford (1989). Data analysis involved descriptive statistics using SPSS software. The sample consisted of 22 high-achieving adult learners (6 males and 16 females) within the English Language Department at the Faculty of Education, Gasser bin Ghasheer, Libya. The study concludes that the sample are medium users of language learning strategies with focus on the use of meta-cognitive strategies. The findings contribute to understanding effective language learning strategies in a specific context and offer valuable insights for strategy training and enhancing language acquisition outcomes.

الملخص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة الكمية استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة التي يعتمدها طلاب قسم اللغة الإنجليزية المتفوقين في كلية التربية بقصر بن غشير. وتشمل أدوات جمع البيانات استبيان خلفية واستبيان "مخزون استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة " (SILL)الذي وضعه أكسفورد في عام 1989. تضمن تحليل البيانات الإحصاءات الوصفية لتفسير النتائج. تكونت

العينة من **22** متعلمًا بالغًا متفوقًا (**6** ذكور و **16** إناث). تخلص الدراسة إلى أن العينة تستخدم استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة بشكل متوسط مع التركيز على استخدام استراتيجيات التعلم الذاتية-الادراكية. تساهم النتائج في فهم استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة الفعالة في سياق محدد وتقدم رؤى قيّمة للتدريب على استخدام الاستراتيجيات وتعزيز نتائج اكتساب اللغة**.**

Introduction and background of the study

 A monolingual society like Libya, where Arabic is the dominant language and English is primarily learned in formal educational settings, opportunities for communicative English language use outside the classroom are limited (Owen et al., 2019; Alhmali, 2007; Abidin et al., 2012). Consequently, learners must take responsibility for creating language acquisition opportunities and developing strategies to enhance their skills (Rubin, 1975; Arulselvi, 2016). Autonomous learning plays a crucial role in improving linguistic proficiency, with successful language learners relying heavily on autonomous work (Lan, 2005; Oxford, 2003; Chen, 2015).

To become successful language learners, individuals need to be autonomous and understand which learning strategies work best for them (Rubin, 1975). Studying the learning strategies employed by high-achieving learners can guide strategy training and assist lower-level learners in achieving better results.

Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies can be categorized into six groups based on Oxford's (1989) taxonomy, which is widely referenced and inclusive (Bessai, 2018; Riazi and Rahimi, 2005). These groups include memory strategies, cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

Memory strategies involve linking new and previous knowledge, using visual associations, revising lessons, and practicing words in sentences. Cognitive strategies focus on effective language use, such as reading for leisure, practicing pronunciation, and summarizing information. Compensation strategies are used in conversations and involve utilizing clues, guessing, gestures, and repair strategies. Meta-cognitive strategies encompass creating language use opportunities, monitoring progress, self-assessment, and utilizing feedback to improve while setting goals. Affective strategies involve managing anxiety triggers, self-motivation, and self-encouragement. Social strategies encompass cooperative and collaborative learning, where learners assist each other to enhance language acquisition.

Oxford (1990) developed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), a widely referenced and utilized questionnaire that assesses language learning strategies. It aligns with the six groups mentioned above (Tretter and Ardasheva, 2013; Bessai, 2018).

Relevant Studies

A study conducted on Algerian college students (Bessai, 2018) found that third-year students used language learning strategies (LLS) more frequently than first-year students. Third-year students favored meta-cognitive strategies, while first-year students used compensation strategies less often. Similar findings have been observed in studies conducted in various settings, such as Chinese, Puerto Rican, Korean, Taiwanese, French, Iranian, and Hungarian language learners, where meta-cognitive strategies were commonly used (Chang, 1991; Green, 1991; Oh, 1992; Yang, 1994; Merrifield, 1996; Park, 1997; Bremner, 1999; Peacock and Ho, 2003; OK, 2003; Shamis, 2003; Riazi and Rahimi, 2005; Habok and Magyar, 2018). However, a study on Japanese university students showed a preference for memory and cognitive strategies (Noguchi, 1991).

While there may be variations in the use of LLS due to cultural differences, proficiency levels, and settings, meta-cognitive and compensation strategies are consistently prevalent. The studies mentioned are diagnostic studies with large samples, focusing on

identifying the types of strategies used by specific groups of students. The present research investigates successful learners within a specific context, and although the sample may not be representative of the entire student population, the results can be generalized to high-achieving learners within the department and faculty. Future studies in different settings can compare their findings to the current research.

Research Questions

- What are the dominant language learning strategies (LLS) used by the sampled learners?

- What is the frequency of their use of LLS?

Research Objectives

- To identify and describe the specific language learning strategies employed by EFL successful learners within the English language department in the faculty of education in Gasser Bin Ghesheer.

- To determine the frequency of language learning strategy (LLS) use among Libyan language successful learners.

Methodology
Instruments
The study utilized two questionnaires; background questionnaire and SILL (STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING) Oxford's (1990) questionnaire.

1- The initial questionnaire gathered academic background information about the sample, including their semester and average scores in previous semesters (ranging from 40% to 100%). This helped exclude students with an average score below 80-90%. The background questionnaire was administered to the

sample before they filled out the SILL questionnaire. Its purpose was to collect information on their background and education, such as age, year of study, gender, and overall average score obtained during their studies at the faculty.

2- The second questionnaire is (STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING) (SILL), it aims to measure the use of 6 strategies as mentioned in the literature review section, memory, cognitive, meta-cognitive, compensation, affective , social. Each strategy section is divided into sub-sections. Memory section (numbers of item =8), cognitive (14 items), compensation (6 items), meta-cognitive (9 items), affective (6 items), social (6 items). The Oxford 1990 SILL uses 5 points Likert scale questionnaire;

l. Never or almost never true of me 2. Usually not true of me   3. Somewhat true of me   4. Usually true of me   5. Always or almost always true for me

The Oxford SILL (1990) questionnaire has been used in assessing learners' strategies in a large number of studies. Additionally, its validity and reliability has been repeatedly checked and confirmed (Riazi and Rahimi, 2005; Oxford and Stock, 1995).

Sample

The sample was students whose average score ranges between 80% – 90 % in most semesters according to the background questionnaire results. This score is the sum of their marks/grades obtained in the semester they have studied at the faculty. Sample size is 22 participants of both genders (6 males and 16 females), ages ranged between 20-25.

Sampling method

The researchers have chosen high achieving students for the purposes of answering the research questions. The results of the background questionnaire were used as an indication to which students are advanced and more successful in their academic work. The collective initial sample was 65 students which was later reduced to the 22 sampled high achieving learners.

Data analysis and Findings
This section includes a description of the study sample selection, and the methodology used to handle the sample. Additionally, it outlines the statistical data processing and measurement tools utilized in the study. The researchers adopted a descriptive approach to obtain responses that unveil the key strategies employed by outstanding students in acquiring English language skills. This involved administering a questionnaire to a randomly selected sample of outstanding students from the Department of English at the Faculty of Education, Gasser bin Ghashir.

Study population and sample
The study population consisted of outstanding students in the English Language Department at the Faculty of Education, Qasr Bin Ghashir.
The following table shows the distribution of the study sample in terms of Gender, 87.0% of females and 13.0% of males; this vast difference in the distribution of the sample by Gender is attributed to the fact that the most of the college of education students are generally female.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample study by Gender

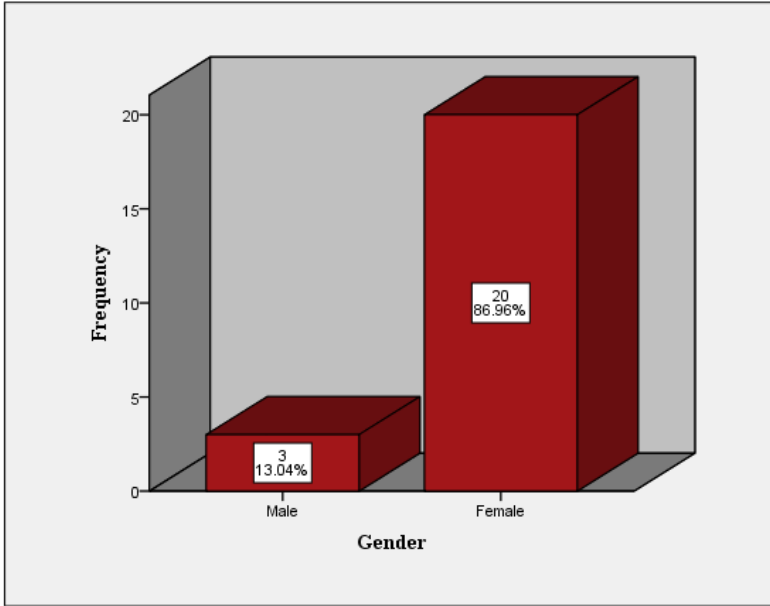| Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	3	13.0
Female	20	87.0
Total	23	100.0

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the sample study by Gender

The study found that 34.8% of the sample consisted of eighth-semester students. Additionally, 21.7% of the sample comprised students from the fifth semester and advanced classes (ninth semester and above). Students in the fourth semester accounted for 17.4% of the sample. The table clearly demonstrates that the sample primarily consisted of students in advanced classes, allowing for an assessment of how these strategies benefitted their English language skills and academic performance. Please refer to the table below for the distribution of the sample across semesters.

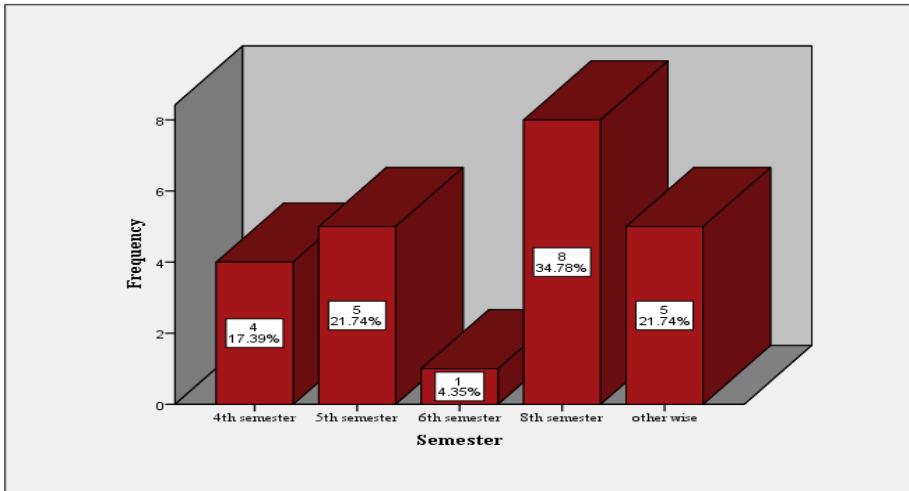| Semester	Frequency	Percent
4th semester	4	17.4
5th semester	5	21.7
6th semester	1	4.3
8th semester	8	34.8
other wise	5	21.7
Total	23	100.0

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the sample study by Semester

Table 3 shows the distribution of the sample study by Age

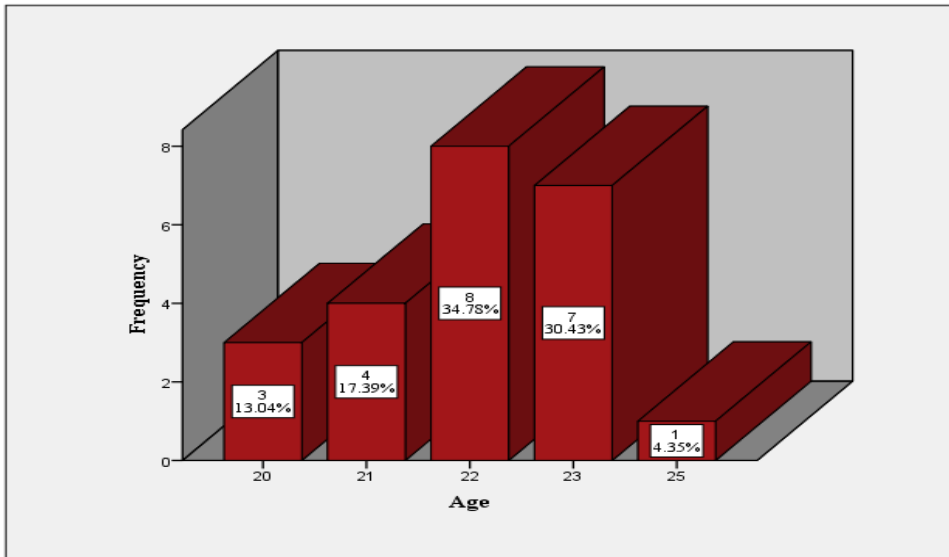| Your Age	Frequency	Percent
20	3	13.0
21	4	17.4
22	8	34.8
23	7	30.4
25	1	4.3
Total	23	100.0

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Figure 3 shows the distribution of the sample study by Age

According to the table, the study sample was distributed by age as follows: 82.6% of outstanding students were between the ages of 21 and 23 (17.4% at 21 years, 34.8% at 22 years, and 30.4% at 23 years). A small percentage of the sample was over 23 years old, and 13.7% were early-stage students.

Research Tool

Data collection in this study relied on questionnaires, which contained various questions formulated by the researchers to address and serve the research problem (Oxford, 1990).

The reliability of the study tool

Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to verify the reliability of the questionnaire, and the results showed an overall Cronbach's Alpha of 0.88. This high value indicates that the measure is sufficiently consistent and reliable, allowing us to rely on it for our study.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.880	50

Once the reliability of the study tool was confirmed, the researchers administered the questionnaire to a sample of outstanding students from the English Language Department at the Faculty of Education, Qasr Bin Ghashir.

Methods of statistical analysis

Descriptive analysis was conducted using percentages, arithmetic averages, and standard deviations for each statement in the questionnaire. The first question of the research focused on identifying the learning strategies employed by successful English language learners. Arithmetic averages and standard deviations were used to assess whether there was a statistically significant differentiation in the attitudes of outstanding students towards the strategies they used.

Descriptive Statistics

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning	Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation
PART A: MEMORY STRATEGIES	5	2.0767	.28751
PART B: COGNITIVE STRATEGIES	3	2.2919	.29913
PART C: COMPENSATION STRATEGIES	2	2.3652	.32821
PART D: METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES	1	2.3913	.38031
PART E: AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES	4	2.0870	.42602
PART F: SOCIAL STRATEGIES	6	2.0758	.45637

The First Question
- What are the dmoinant language learning strategies (LLS) used by the sampled learners?

The table above presents the results indicating that "METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES" received the highest rating as the main strategy inventory for language learning, with an arithmetic average of 2.39 and a standard deviation of 0.3803. This was followed by "COMPENSATION STRATEGIES" with an arithmetic average of 2.37 and a standard deviation of 0.3282. "COGNITIVE STRATEGIES" ranked third, with an arithmetic average of 2.29 and a standard deviation of 0.229. Participants also reported using "AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES" with an arithmetic average of 2.09 and a standard deviation of 0.4260, while 63.3% attributed this to "MEMORY STRATEGIES". Lastly, "SOCIAL STRATEGIES" received the lowest rating with an arithmetic average of 2.08 and a standard deviation of 0.4564.

The Second Question
-   The second question of the research was expressed as "what is the frequency of their use of the LLS?" From the second question we can derive the following sub-questions:

1. **What is the frequency of their use of the Memory Strategies?**
2. **What is the frequency of their use of the Cognitive Strategies?**
3. **What is the frequency of their use of the Compensation Strategies?**
4. **What is the frequency of their use of the Meta-cognitive Strategies?**
5. **What is the frequency of their use of the Affective Strategies?**
6. **What is the frequency of their use of the Social Strategies?**

Frequency, Arithmetic averages, and standard deviations were used in order to determine 'what is the frequency of their use of the language Learning Strategies?' for all sub-questions.

Oxford (1989) suggests a mean range of 2.4 and lower for low, a mean range of 2.5 to 3.4 for medium, and a mean range of 3.5 to 5 for high levels of LLS use. The highest mean score for the sample's use of LLS was metacognitive strategies, with a mean of 2.39. Compensation strategies scored second highest with a mean of 2.37, and cognitive strategies came third with a mean of 2.29, followed by affective

startegies with a mean of 2.08. Lastly, social strategies and memory strategies with a mean of 2.07.

Discussion of Results

In the literature, a point is made about the link between autonomy and LLS use in student-centered classrooms. However, in Libya, classrooms are teacher-centered and teaching focuses on exams and passing subjects by reciting information, rather than working autonomously and creating opportunities for students to use the language authentically. While learning strategies are expected to be used to a certain extent, they are not a central integral aspect of learners' work, either autonomously or within the classroom.

Oxford (1989) suggests a mean range of 2.4 and lower for low, a mean range of 2.5 to 3.4 for medium, and a mean range of 3.5 to 5 for high levels of LLS use. The highest mean score for the sample's use of LLS was metacognitive strategies, with a mean of 2.39. Compensation strategies scored second highest with a mean of 2.37, and cognitive strategies came third with a mean of 2.29. This indicates that the sample are low-frequency users of LLS. This can mean that a lack of strategy training led to learners not relying on specific language learning strategies to boost their acquisition of the language. The majority of the samples in the cited previous studies in the literature review (Chang,1991; Green,1991; Oh ,1992; Yang, 1994; Merrifield,1996; Park, 1997; Bremner,1999; Peacock and Ho,2003; OK,2003; Shamis ,2003) were medium strategy users, in agreement with the superiority of metacognitive strategies.

In the sample's responses, they valued feedback to avoid repeating mistakes, in addition to noticing their use of the language. The sampled learners also planned their learning to make time to learn the language. As Rubin (1975) and others have noted, LLS are conscious steps to learn the language. This means that learners can be trained to become aware of what works for them to achieve the most from their time while learning and make their autonomous work more productive. According to the results of this study, poor-performing students can be trained to use

metacognitive strategies to plan and organize their learning of the language.

Conclusion

To answer the research questions.
The answer to the first question is that the most learning strategies used by English language successful learner were META-COGNITIVE STRATEGIES" which agrees with the literature on the predominance of meta-cognitive strategies among language learners. However, unlike most studies cited in the literature review (relevant studiessection), the sample were low frequency users of **LLS**. Further research needs to take place on Libyan learners autonomy and their utilization of LLS.

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