LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY USE BY ARAB GULF FEMALE TEFL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT:
    The present study investigated the use of language learning strategies of 100 female students majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language(TEFL)at Ajman University of Science and Technology (AUST), UAE. The Strategy use was assessed through the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990). The major findings were that the reported frequency of strategy use by the students was overall quite high, with the students reporting most frequent use of meta cognitive strategies and least of affecive and memory strategies. The learners' use of cognitive strategies highly correlated with their scores in reading skills. The learners' Accumulative Grade Point Average (AGPA) and their scores in oral and writing skills significantly correlated with the use of the cognitive strategies. Similarly, the learners' use of compensation strategies significantly correlated with their scores in reading skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

    The use of different Language Learning Strategies (LLS) in foreign language learning is viewed by theorists as one vehicle for promoting greater success (see Macaro, 2006). They believe that these strategies are teachable skills, meaning that teachers can help in the language-learning process by making students aware of strategies and encouraging their use and those students who are less successful language learners can learn these skills (Griffiths et al. 2001).

    LLS are different from teaching strategies (the methods/techniques followed by teachers to help students to learn) in that it is the learner, not the teacher, who exercises control over the operations of certain activity (O'Malley et al. 1985). As a result, LLS and language use have received considerable attention by many language educators (Stevick, 1976; Shipman & Shipman, 1985; Oxford 1990; Cohen, 1990, 1998; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden 1991; Brown, 1991; Rubin & Thompson, 1994; Mendelsohn, 1994; McDonough, 1995).

    In spite of the increasing popularity of research on learning strategies since the mid 70s, the topic of learning strategies is still a new research area in the Arab world. There have been few studies conducted on the use of learning strategies. This study aims to explore the LLS of students majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at Ajman University of Science and Technology (AUST),UAE.

2. Aim of the Study
This study aims at:
(1) identify type and frequency of language learning strategies used by TEFL students,

AUST .

(2) investigate the relationship of learners' use of the LLS, their AGPA , and their scores in the

    language skills.

3. The Significant of the Study

The present study focuses on LLS which, as indicated in section 1, have not been thoroughly investigated in the Arab world. It is one of the few studies, if not the first one in the region that addresses TEFL female students strategy use. This study may give more insights into LLS research which, according to Oxford (1990:16) 'is necessarlly in its infancy' hoping positive effect on language teaching and learning. Findings of the study may help trainers and instructors to focus, during teaching, on language learning strategies which have not been used by the participants and at the sametime encourage and enhance the stratigies already used.

4. The Questions of the study

The study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What types of LLS are most frequently used by Arab female TEFL students?
2. What is the relationship of learners' use of the LLS, their AGPA and their scores in the language skills?

5. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

5.1. Definitions of Language Learning Strategies

The word strategy comes from the ancient Greek term strategia which has the meaning of generalship of the art of the war (Oxford,1990) and implies planning, competition, conscious manipulation, and movement towards a goal.

Learning strategy in language learning is defined, in the Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, as "a way in which a learner attempts to work out the meanings and uses of words, grammatical rules, and other aspects of a language, for example by the use of GENERALIZATION and INFERENCING" (Richards et al. 1985:162).

Cook(1991:78) defines learning strategy as "a choice that the learner makes while learning or using the second language that affects learning."

Learning strategies have been broadly defined as "specific actions or techniques that students use, often intentionally, to improve their progress in developing L2 skills" (Green and Oxford 1995:262).

Dansereau (1985:210) defines learning strategies as a "set of processes or steps (used by a learner) that can facilitate the acquisition, storage, and /or utilization of information".

Wenden and Rubin (1987:7-8) define strategies as specific actions or techniques employed by learners. They say (1987: 19) that strategies are "behaviours and thought processes that learners use in the process of learning". According to them strategies are not characteristics describing a learner's general approach (e.g. learners who are reflective, risk-takers, etc.) but they are problem-oriented. Learners utilise them to respond to a learning need, to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information. Strategies are actions that contribute directly to learning (e.g. guessing from a text). Through the use of

strategies they control/ transform knowledge about language, they retrieve and use that knowledge. Strategies can also contribute to learning in an indirect way.

Chamot and Kupper (1989) define learning strategies as techniques used by students to comprehend, store and remember new information and skills. They add that some aspects are observable, whereas other aspects are non-observable.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) define strategies as intentional cognitive or affective actions taken by the learner in order to learn both simple and complex material.

For Cohen (1990:5), the most characteristic feature of learning strategies is that they are "learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner".

Oxford (1990:8) argues that the definition commonly used by educators does not fully convey the excitement or richness of language learning strategies and expands the definition by saying that "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".

Vandergrift (1995) states that there seems to be no consensus on the meaning of the term "strategy". Some use the term to mean "techniques and devices" which can be used to elaborate taxonomies, some to refer to "general learners' characteristics".

Definitions certainly vary, as do the taxonomies, and such variety could be the reason which led (Ellis, 1994: 529) to say that language learning strategies itself remains "fuzzy".

5.2. Language Learning Strategies Classifications

Research into language learning strategies began in the 1960s due to the development in education.Particularly, developments in cognitive psychology influenced much of the research done on language learning strategies (Wiliams and Burden, 1997).

The main finding of most researches conducted on language learning strategies and good language learners conclude in general that good language learners use more and better language learning strategies than do poor learners (Oxford; 1989,1993). This result has appeared consistently in L2 learning strategy studies (Rubin 1975; Stern, 1975; Hosenfeld, 1977; Naiman et al. 1978). Early researchers tended to make lists of strategies used by all good language learners. Rubin (1975), for example, suggested that the good language learner is a willing and accurate guesser; has a strong, persevering drive to communicate; focuses on form by looking for patterns; takes advantage of all practice opportunities; monitors his or her own speech as well as that of others; and pays attention to meaning. Naiman et al. (1975) mentioned six strategies used by the good language learners:

1. selecting language situations that allow one's preferences to be used;
2. actively being involved in language learning;
3. seeing language as both a rule system and a communication tool;
4. extending and revising one's understanding of the language;
5. learning to think in the language; and
6. addressing the affective demands of language learning.

Rubin (1981, 1987), who pionered much of the work in the field of strategies, identified two main kinds of strategies contributing to language learning success. Direct strategies which are divided into six types: clarification/verification, monitoring, guessing/inductive inferencing, deductive reasoning, practice, and memorization, and the indirect strategies which she divided into two types: creating opportunities for practice, and using production tricks.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) have carried out extensive research into learner strategies and have found out that foreign language learners use three types of strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies. Metacognitive strategies involve thinking about and planning one's learning, evaluating how well one has done, monitoring one's own speech or writing. Cognitive strategies involve conscious actions such as using dictionaries and other resources. Social strategies mean interacting with others like classmates or native speakers. Research has shown that cognitive strategies account for the majority of the strategies reported by foreign language learners, namely 53 per cent. Advanced preparation for the lesson by the student is one of the most important ones. Metacognitive strategies accounted for 30 per cent, while social strategies made up the remaining 17 per cent. The type of strategy used varies according to the task the students are engaged in. A general assumption is that good learners will make a better use of these strategies.

Oxford system of language learning strategies (1990) which was based on earlier work on good language learning strategies in general and in relation to the four language skills. She divides strategies into two major classes: direct and indirect. Direct strategies, which "involve direct learning and use of the subject matter, in this case a new language" are subdivided into three groups: memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies; Indirect strategies, which "contribute indirectly but powerfully to learning" (Oxford 1990:11-12) are also subdivided into three groups: metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. According to Oxford (1990), memory strategies, such as creating mental linkages and employing actions, aid in entering information into long-term memory and retrieving information when needed for communication. Cognitive strategies, such as analysing and reasoning, are used for forming and revising internal mental modes and receiving and producing messages in the target language. Compensation strategies, such as guessing unknown words while listening and reading or using circumlocution in speaking and writing, are needed to overcome any gaps in knowledge of the language. Metacognitive strategies help learners exercise executive control through planning, arranging, focusing, and evaluation their own learning process. Affective strategies enable learners to control feelings, motivations, and attitudes related to language learning. Social strategies, such as asking questions and cooperation with others, facilitate interaction with others, often in a discourse situation. Logically, individuals will apply different strategies depending on their personality, cognitive style, and the task at hand. But although cultural and ethnic background, personality, sex, language learning purpose, and other factors influence the degree to which and the way in which learners use.

Jones(1998)and (Ellis, 1994) accept Oxfod's claim that her strategies 'system is more comprehensive and detailed than earlier classification models of

LLS, it is still, of necessity, somewhat selective since "dozens and perhaps hundreds of such strategies exist" (Oxford et al. 1989:29).

Oxford (1990) admits that the confilects of classifications is possibe, and gives as, an example, the compensation strategy such as using synonyms when the exact word is unknown is a learning strategy or a communication strategy for some experts. She indicates that some specialists of LLS are confused whether a certain strategy "like self-monitoring, should be called direct or indirect"(p.22). In other place (1990:17), she adds:

> there is no complete agreement on exactly what strategies are;
> how many strategies exist; how they should be defined,
> demarcated, and categorised; and whether it is - or ever will be -
> possible to create a real, scientifically validated hierarchy of
> strategies.

However, according to Griffiths (2004), Oxford's classification system together with Rigney's definition can provide a useful base to understand or investigate LLS.

5 3. Language Learning Strategies and Learning Styles

It should be noted that LLS are distinct from learning styles, which refer more broadly to a learner's "natural, habitual, and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills" (Reid, 1995: viii), though liinks between learning styles and the type of strategies learners choose were found . Rossi-Le (1989) studied a group of learners from a variety of linguistic backgrounds (Chinese, Laotian, Vietnamese, Spanish and Other) using both the PLSP and the SILL questionnaires. The results demonstrated that an individual's learning-style preference influences the types of learning strategies that he or she will employ in acquiring a second language. For example, students who favoured group study utilized social and interactive strategies such as working with peers, requesting clarification, and asking for correction. Students who preferred tactile and kinesthetic learning styles sought out native speakers and engaged others in conversation. Further, Ehrman & Oxford, 1988, 1989; Oxford & Ehrman, 1988) suggest that learning style has a significant influence on students' choice of learning strategies, and that both styles and strategies affect learning outcomes.

5.4. Language Learning Strategies and Skills

According to Oxford (1990) and Chamot and Kupper (1989), certain strategies or clusters of strategies are linked to particular language skills or tasks. For instance, writing benefits from the learning strategies of planning, self-monitoring, deduction, and substitution. Speaking demands strategies such as risk-taking, paraphrasing, circumlocution, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. Listening comprehension gains from strategies of elaboration, inferencing, selective attention, and self-monitoring. Reading comprehension uses strategies like reading aloud, guessing, deduction, and summarizing. Figure1, suggested by the researcher, illustrates this.
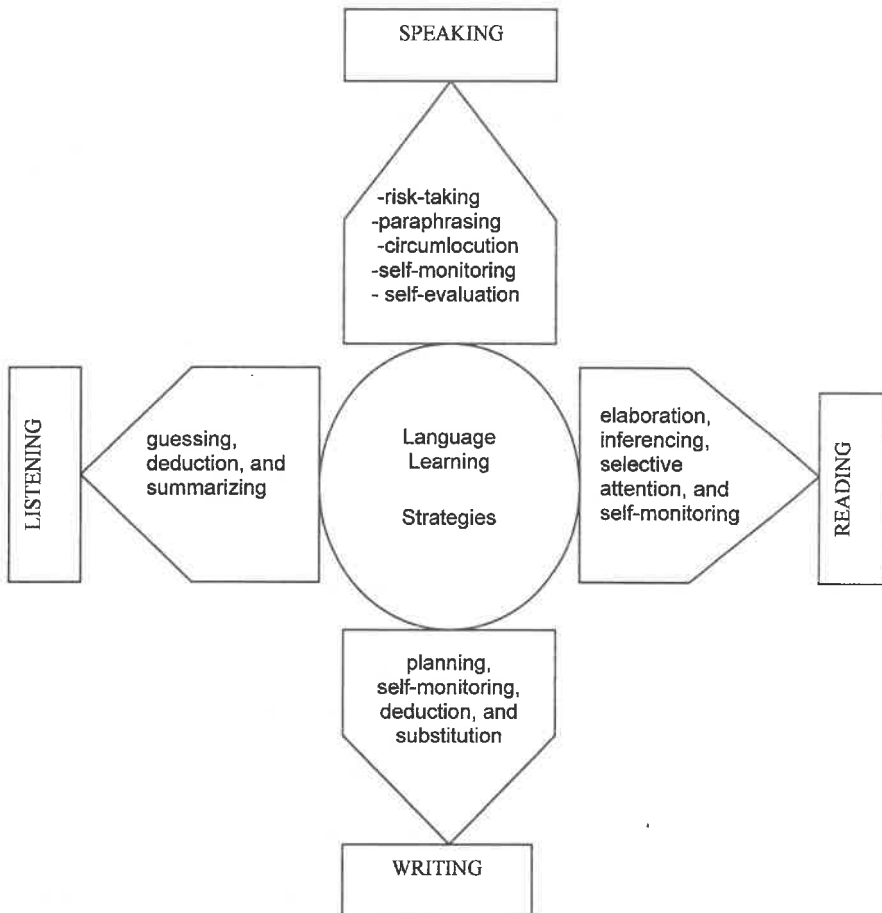
Figure 1. The relationship between strategies and language skills

A considerable amount of research has been conducted to evaluate the benefits of explicitly training learners how to apply LLS for the skills of reading and writing (see McDonough 1995).Further, some research has also been conducted on listening comprehension (see Mendelsohn 1994, Fujiware's ,1990, Ozeki's ,2000).

Concerning speaking, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) compared the improvement on certain language tasks for three groups of learners, and related their performance to the strategy training they had received. On the speaking task, the group given explicit training in metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective strategies improved significantly more than the control group.

'Aliweh (1990) found that training Egyptian EFL university students to use communication strategies improved their spoken performance and strategy use. Dörnyei (1995) in his study suggested the feasibility of training learners in the use of communication strategies.He trained Hungarian EFL high school students in using three compensatory communication strategies (topic avoidance and replacement,

circumlocution, and using fillers and hesitation devices) and found that students' strategy use improved qualitatively and quantitatively, but this was not the case for their speaking competence.

Research shows that the use of appropriate language learning strategies often results in improved proficiency or achievement overall or in specific skill areas (Oxford, et al. 1993).

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1. Subjects

The fourth-year students were the subjects of this study. They were 100 female students majoring in TEFL at AUST. Their ages ranged from 22 to 24 years.The students were informed that their responses to the questionnaires would be kept confidential and would have no effect on their course grades. The completed questionnaires were collected right after the subjects completed them.Of the 100 completed questionnaires, three were discarded as they were incomplete. As a result, 97 questionnaires were subjected to statistical analysis.

6.2.The Instrument

The Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), version 7.0 (Oxford,1990) was used in the data collection. The SILL, a self-reporting questionnaire is for students of English as a second or foreign language by requiring students to answer 50-item questions on their language-strategy use on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "never or almost never true" to "always, or almost always true.". It covers the six Oxford's (1990) LLS categories :

1. Memory strategies for storing and retrieving new information;
2. cognitive strategies for manipulating and transforming learning materials;
3. compensation strategies for overcoming deficiencies of knowledge in language;
4. metacognitive strategies for directing the learning process;
5. affective strategies for regulating emotions; and finally,
6. social strategies for increasing learning experience with other people.

The instrument was translated into Arabic by the researcher and checked by two colleagues in the TEFL department, who have experience in translation. Items 46 and 48 were slightly modified because they were not more compatible with the English learning situation of the present study

This questionnare has been widely used in more than 40-50 major studies including dissertations and theses (Green and Oxford, 1995) and it has high relaibility and validity (see also Nykos and Oxford, 1993). However, it was tested following a pilot study with 20 students comparable to the participants of the study. Cronbach alpha for reliability was 0.82.

Though the English version of this questionnare was given to the participants with its translation (Appendix A), it was taken into consideration that the items of the questionnaire retained their essential meaning.

The participants were requested to write their names (optional),their AGPA, and their scores of the language skills to find out the relationship between the students' proficiency and the language learning strategies.

Analysis

Descriptive and inferencial statistics were used to analyse the data and examine the frecuancy and type of LLS the learners use.Correlation analysis was used to determine if there is any relationship between the learners' LLS use and their AGPA and their scores in the language skills.

7. RESULTS AND DESCUSSION

7.1. The frequency of language learning strategies used by TEFL students

The mean scores of the six categories of learning strategies used by the TEFL students are reported in Table 1. As it can be seen, all means fell between 3.24 and 3.94 on a scale of 1 to 5, a range which Oxford (1990) defined as medium use and the low end of high use range. The frequencies of use revealed in the current study appeared to be similar to those found among a small sample of Foreign Service Institute (FSI) learners, teachers, and supervisors (Ehrman and Oxford, 1989). It could be due to similar experience in language learning. The subjects of the present study to their subjects were relatively experienced language learners who already knew a great deal about how to learn.

Students reported using meta cognitive strategies more frequently (M= 3.94) than the five other types of English learning strategies. Social and cognitive strategies came in the second place (M=3.66 and 3.65), followed by compensation strategies (M=3.56), and affective strategies (M=3.28).Memory strategies scored the lowest mean (M=3, 24), though this score is still, according to Oxford (1990), of the medium use range.
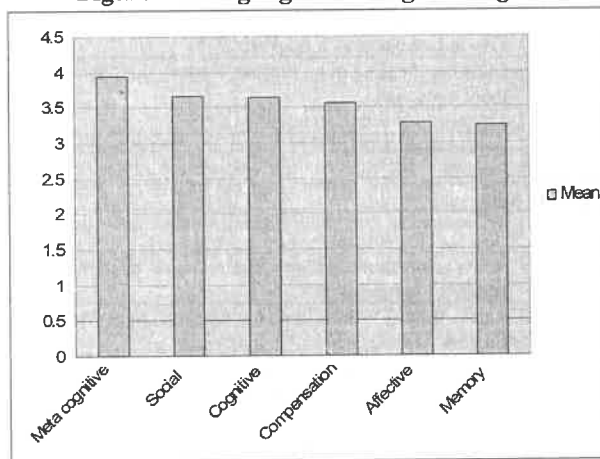
Table 1. Means,standard deviations and percentages

Strategies	Mean	Std. Deviation	Precentage
Meta cognitive	3.94	0.59	78.8%
Social	3.66	0.73	73.3%
Cognitive	3.65	0.50	73.0%
Compensation	3.56	0.66	71.1%
Affective	3.28	0.63	65.6%
Memory	3.24	0.58	64.8%

This result is similar to the results of Phillips (1991), who found that for of 141 university-level Asian ESL students, metacognitive (M=3.70) and social (M= 3.65) strategies were used more frequently than affective (M= 3.12) and mnemonic (M= 3.00) strategies, similar to Hong-Nam and Leavll's (2006) study who found that the least used strategies by students in an intensive English learning context were affective strategies and memory strategies. Also, the present study matched those of Grainger (1997) who found that the most preferred groups of strategies for English background students were social and metacognitive strategies, contradicting the premise usually held that Arab learners tend to use mostly rote learning (memorization). Further, as Arab learners are concerned, the result of the present study is similar to the study of Riazi (2007) who studied LLS use of Qatari Arab-speaking learners majoring in English. However, these results did not match those of Politzer and McGroarty (1985) nor of O'Malley and Chamot studies (1990) which reported that students from Asian backgrounds preferred rote learning and language rules as opposed to more communicative strategies.

As the subjects were female Arab learners, less frequent use of social strategies in the study was expected. Contrary to our expectations, social strategies, as seen in Table 2, were the second most-preferred strategies by the subjects in this study. The high usage of social strategies could be attributed ,perhaps , to factors as: the awareness of these subjects,who are students'teachers, of the benefits of asking, for example, the democratic atmosphere at the university (AUST) and the development of computer, multimedia and the network technologies, which have increased students' exposure to foreign cultures and more English input.

The means of the six LLS categories listed in Table 1 are graphically presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Language Learning Strategies

To give more information of the LLS use, Table 2 presents the items that constitute each strategy in addition to means, standard deviations and frequency of usage of every single item
Table 2. Means,standard deviations of learners' self-reported frequency of English language learning strategy use

Variable. No.	Rank	Strategy	M	SD
Memory Strategies				
1	12	I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	4.01	.82
2	27	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	3.57	.85
3	24	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.	3.64	1.12
4	34	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	3.47	1.19
5	46	I use rhymes to remember new English words.	2.98	1.11
6	49	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	2.14	1.19
7	48	I physically act out new English words.	2.47	1.20
8	26	I review English often.	3.57	.99

Variable. No.	Rank	Strategy	M	SD
9	25	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page,	3.60	1.16
Cognitive Strategies				
10	8	I say or write new English words several times.	4.11	.93
11	14	I try to talk like native English speakers.	3.94	.94
12	18	I practise the sounds of English.	3.79	.93
13	23	I use the English words I know in different ways.	3.65	.87
14	20	I start conversations in English.	3.70	1.02
15	5	I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to the movies spoken in English.	4.19	.95
16	13	I read for pleasure in English.	4.00	.100
17	44	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports.	3.20	1.06
18	9	I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	4.10	.90
19	29	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	3.55	.96
20	40	I try to find patterns in English.	3.32	1.02
21	31	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing into parts that I understand.	3.53	1.10
22	32	I try not to translate word-for-word.	3.48	1.15
23	42	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	3.30	1.06
Compensation Strategies				
24	10	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	4.06	1.16
25	35	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	3.47	1.39
26	47	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	2.81	1.28
27	45	I read English without looking up every new word.	3.11	1.11
28	21	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	3.68	.83
29	4	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	4.31	.89
Meta cognitive Strategies				
30	15	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	3.89	.89
31	7	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	4.11	.81
32	2	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	4.44	.79
33	3	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	4.39	.79
34	39	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	3.33	.97
35	30	I look for people I can talk to in English.	3.53	.89
36	33	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	3.48	1.09
37	16	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	3.88	.97
38	1	I think about my progress in learning English.	4.65	.60
Affective Strategies				

Variable. No.	Rank	Strategy	M	SD
39	22	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	3.66	1.11
40	11	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	4.03	.95
41	43	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	3.28	1.29
42	37	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	3.41	1.17
43	50	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	2.06	1.64
44	38	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	3.35	1.33
Social Strategies				
45	19	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	3.79	1.10
46	41	I ask the English speakers to correct me when I talk with me.	3.31	1.10
47	28	I practise English with other students.	3.56	1.16
48	6	I ask for help from English speakers.	4.19	1.02
49	17	I ask questions in English.	3.81	.79
50	36	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3.42	1.27

The table shows that most of the items with the highest means are Metacognitive Strategy items. As seen, item number 38 (I think about my progress in learning English) has the highest score, with a mean of 4.65 followed by the Item 32 (I pay attention when someone is speaking English), with a mean of 4.4, item 33 (I try to find out how to be a better learner of English) with a mean of 4.39. Followed by the items of the cognitive and compensation

7.2.The relationship of learners' use of the LLS to their AGPA , and their scores in the language skills

As far as the relationship between the learners' use of the LLS and their AGPA and their scores in language skills concerned, the learners' use of cognitive strategies highly correlates with their scores in reading skills, significant at 0.01 level (See Table 3).The learners' AGPA and their scores in oral and writing skills significantly correlate with the use of the cognitive strategies, significant at the level of 0.05. Such results indicate that more proficient students are aware of their needs and look for more opportunities to practice the language. Further, the results of the present study are similar to the results of some studies of (Politzer, 1983; Ramirez, 1986; Chamot, 1987; Oxford and Nyikos, 1989; Kim, 1992; Park, 1997; Park, 1999; Green and Oxford,1993) which found that high proficiency groups used significantly greater strategies than low groups.

Table 3. Correlations between Learners ' use of the LLS and their AGPA
and their scores in the Language Skills

Strategies	AGPA	Listening and Speaking	Reading	Writing
Memory	.178	.145	.177	.183
Cognitive	.244(*)	.243(*)	.283(**)	.255(*)
Compensation	.180	.191	.219(*)	.160
Metacognitive	.168	.110	.100	.148
Affective	.107	.107	.039	.083
Social	-.033	-.107	-.089	-.078

** Pearson Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Pearson Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Similarly, the learners' use of compensation strategies significantly correlated with their scores in reading skills, significant at the level of 0.05. which is a good indication of the awareness of the participants of this study regarding the reading strategies such as guessing. As shown in Table 3, there were no significant correlations between the use of the rest of the other strategies (met cognitive, affective and social strategies) and the learners' AGPA and their scores in the language skills.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our learners are actively engaged in managing their language learning process.They ask questions and cooperate with others, they are mentally involved in learning strategies such as practicing and repeating. Further, they guess and use circumlocution to overcome any gaps in knowledge of the target language.

The present study has also found that the more successful the learners are, the more often they use language strategies.Therefore, it can be recommened that English language learners should be trained, during the language classes, to recognise and use the LLS related to the skill/s and tasks.But this should be preceded by making sure that the language instuctors are more aware of the LLS.

As the results of the present study is still limited due to the type of the sample, the instrument, used to find out the participants' proficiency was their AGPA and their scores in language skills, further research is recommended :
1-As the participants of this study are only female, a new research comparing between male and femlale can reveal significant resuls.
2- Study of the LLS use by learners of different deciplines can be recommended.
3-A research to understand the LLS and how they relate to Arab learners' styles can be valuable.

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