

Language learning strategies: Perceptions of female Saudi EFL learners

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the pattern of language learning strategies use among a group of Saudi Arabian English-major university students using Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The study also investigates the frequency of strategy use among these students (i.e. what are the most frequently used and least frequently used strategies among this group of Saudi Arabian learners learning English as a foreign language?). The results of this study showed that this group of students used learning strategies with high to medium frequency, and that the highest rank was for metacognitive strategies while the lowest was for memory strategies. The findings of the present study suggest a number of implications for Saudi EFL instruction at the University in which the study was conducted. The findings of this research will also contribute to the knowledge base of language learning strategy research in the Arab region.

1. Introduction

Within the field of education over the last few decades, a gradual but important shift has taken place, resulting in less emphasis on teachers and teaching and more focus on learners and learning. One consequence of the above shift is the stress on, and use of, language learning strategies (LLSs) in second and foreign language (L2/FL) learning and teaching. There has been a great deal of research on language learning strategies investigating a range of learner groups in both English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

contexts. Results of these studies have successfully contributed to our understanding of the nature, categories, and patterns of strategy use in general, as well as their use in different language skills. While many studies around the world have investigated the use of language learning strategies for improving language skills (Chamot, 1987; Oxford, 1990), most research into language learning strategies involving Arab EFL learners - particularly Saudi Arabian learners - compared to other nationalities and ethnic groups remains in the early stage. Case in point, there are only three documented large-scale strategy studies which feature Saudi participants. A groundbreaking study (Al-Otaibi, 2004) examined Saudi EFL students and how they were using LLSs, but it reported on just one geographical location inside Saudi Arabia. The subjects for the other two studies were ESL students who were living and studying in the United States (Braik, 1986) and (Al-Wahibee, 2000). This is not only the researcher's observation, but also the observation of leading educators in the education field as well (Syed, 2003; McMullen, 2009). In addition, Oxford (2001) has suggested that research on language learning strategies should be replicated and extended in order to generate more consistent and verified information within and across groups of learners. Of particular importance is research on how students from different cultural backgrounds use language learning strategy.

To this end, the purpose of this research is to investigate the pattern of language learning strategy use employed by a specific group of Saudi Arabian university students learning English as a foreign language.

Given the shortage of research on Saudi Arabian EFL learners' pattern of language learning strategy use, this research will aim to explore the pattern of language learning strategy use as perceived and reported by a specific group of Saudi Arabian EFL learners. In particular, the research intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the general pattern of language learning strategy use among a

group of Saudi Arabian English-major students, in terms of their overall strategy use and the six categories of the strategies, as presented in the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning?

2. What are the most frequently used and least frequently used strategies among this group of Saudi Arabian EFL learners?

The findings of this research will contribute to the knowledge base of language learning strategy research in the Arab region.

2. Background

When it comes to defining language learning strategies, Oxford and Crookall (1989) have stated that “different researchers use different terms and different concepts” (p. 414). Therefore, a number of definitions for language learning strategies have been used by key figures within the field of second and foreign language education. One of the earliest researchers in this field, Rubin (1975), provided a very broad definition of learning strategies as “the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge” (p. 43). Rubin later wrote that language learning strategies “are strategies which contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly” (1987, p. 22). She also suggested that language learning strategies include “any set of operations, steps, plans, or routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information” (1987, p. 19). Language learning strategies have also been discussed by Chamot (1987), O’Malley and Chamot (1990), and Oxford (1990). Chamot (1987) defined language learning strategies as “techniques, approaches, or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information” (p. 71). She suggested that some language learning strategies are noticeable, but some may not be observable. Similarly, O’Malley and Chamot (1990) viewed language learning strategies as “the special thoughts or behaviours of processing information that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information” (p. 1). They

observed that strategies may be used intentionally, but they can also become habitual and mechanical with practice. Moreover, Oxford (1990) claimed that “learning strategies are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning” (p. 1). She suggested a more specific definition of learning strategies as “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (p. 8). She termed learning strategies as a combination of behaviours used by the learners to assist them in better learning, storing, and recovering information. Oxford also considered learning strategies to consist of the particular tactics that an individual used to overcome learning task.

As indicated above, language learning strategies have been defined and classified by many scholars in the field. However, most of these attempts to classify language learning strategies reflect more or less the same categorizations of language learning strategies without any major changes. For example, since the late 1980s, Oxford (1990) has expanded upon the classification system designed by O'Malley et al. (1985). First, Oxford (1990) distinguishes between direct LLS, “which directly involve the subject matter,” and indirect LLS, which “do not directly involve the subject matter itself, but are essential to language learning nonetheless” (p. 71). Second, each of these broad categories of LLS is further divided into LLS groups. Oxford outlines three main types of direct LLS: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. Memory strategies “aid in entering information into long-term memory and retrieving information when needed for communication.” Cognitive LLS “are used for forming and revising internal mental models and receiving and producing messages in the target language.” Compensation strategies “are needed to overcome any gaps in knowledge of the language” (Oxford, 1990, p. 71). Oxford (1990) also describes three types of indirect LLS: metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. Metacognitive strategies “help learners exercise ‘executive control’ through planning, arranging, focusing, and evaluating their own learning.” Affective LLS

“enable learners to control feelings, motivations, and attitudes related to language learning.” Finally, social strategies “facilitate interaction with others, often in a discourse situation” (Oxford, 1990, p. 71). These six categories that underlie the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) are used by Oxford and others for a great deal of research in the learning strategy field. In addition to that, Oxford’s model outlines a comprehensive, multi-levelled, and theoretically well-conceived taxonomy of language learning strategies. For these reasons, language learning strategies classification in this study will be based on Oxford’s (1990) classification system.

3. Methodology

3.1. Subjects

The participants of this research study were 111 female Saudi Arabian university students who speak Arabic as their native language. They are majoring in English Language and Literature at a state university in Saudi Arabia. The English Language and Literature Programme, in which the participants are enrolled, consists of four years of formal study at the university. In the first two years, students are required to complete courses to boost their English language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). In the last two year, students are required to take courses related to literature and linguistics to cultivate their literary appreciation and critical-analytical ability and to deepen their knowledge of the various branches of modern linguistic theory. The participants were recruited from all educational levels at the university (22 freshmen, 18 sophomores, 39 juniors, and 23 seniors). Their ages ranged from 18 to 29, with an average of 21.8 years. As a measure of language self- efficacy or students’ perceptions of themselves as learners, the students were asked to rate themselves on a scale from one to three to indicate how successful they thought they were in English (listening, writing, speaking, reading), with 1 being very good, 2 being good, and 3 being poor. The majority (80.4%) of the 102 respondents perceived that their English language was

“good”, while only 3.9% perceived that their English language was “poor.” They all had the same exposure to English through the Saudi public educational system. All the subjects had studied English formally for six years and were required to complete 130 credit hours as part of their Bachelor Degree's requirements in English Language and Literature.

3.2. Instrument

As this study aims to determine the language learning strategies employed by a group of Saudi EFL students, a suitable exploration instrument for examining the strategies used among the targeted population had to be chosen. Conducting a survey (using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, or SILL) among a sample of female Saudi Arabian EFL learners was the first choice made by the researcher. There are many reasons behind using the SILL by the researcher for data collection. First, it is an important instrument in the field of language learning strategy for assessing the frequency of use of LLSs by students. Second, it is one of the most useful manuals of learner strategy assessment tools currently available. In addition to that, it is estimated that 40-50 major studies, including dissertations and theses, have employed the SILL. Approximately 9,000 language learners have been involved in studies using the instrument since it was developed. It has been translated into a number of languages, including Chinese, French, German, and Spanish (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). It has also been stated that the SILL appears to be the only language learning strategy instrument that has been checked for its reliability and validity (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). Furthermore, Green and Oxford (1995) indicated that the reliability of the SILL, assessed by Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency, is ordinarily in the .90s range. Not only that but there is also considerable evidence that the SILL is valid after being checked in multiple ways, including its construct validity, content validity, and criterion-related validity (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995).

In order to gather the biographical data that would be required, especially for

the analysis of data, a background questionnaire sheet was added to the back page of the SILL questionnaire. Students were asked to provide details pertaining to their age, and their educational level. Further, as a measure of language self-efficacy, or of students' perception of themselves as learners, the students were asked to rate themselves on a scale from one to three to indicate how successful they thought they were in English (listening, writing, speaking, reading), with 1 being very good, 2 being good, and 3 being poor.

3.3. Procedure and Data Collection

The questionnaire data were collected from female English-major university students at a state university in Saudi Arabia. As a first step in the process of data collection, the researcher contacted the director of the English Language and Literature Department at the University, explaining the nature and purpose of the study. Permission was readily granted to conduct the study. The researcher then emailed the questionnaire to the director. The students were notified in advance that they would be completing the questionnaire on a certain day. The director had copies of the questionnaires prepared. The test was administered to the students by the training assistants. Before the questionnaires were administered, the training assistants were given guidelines and instructions for administering the questionnaire. The assistants then took the questionnaires to class and the test was administered to the students immediately after they finished their classes, using about 30 minutes. All of the subjects received the same instructions on how to fill out the questionnaires. The subjects were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary. The subjects did not give their names; only their ages, average and level of learning were required.

3.4. Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) for Microsoft Windows 17.0 was used to complete the analysis of the collected data, following the

instructions in Field (2009). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, standard deviations and percentages, were implemented in order to investigate the demographic data and the use of language learning strategies. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Levene's test were used to determine whether any significant relationships exist among respondents in the use of language learning strategies regarding their background characteristics. In addition, the .05 level of statistical significance was set at all statistical tests in the present study.

4. Results

The descriptive statistics for the six SILL sub-scales are presented in Table 1, and the means and 95% confidence intervals are illustrated in an error bar chart (Figure 1).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for the six SILL Sub-Scales

SILL sub-scale						Interpretatio
	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	<i>SD</i>	n of Mean
MET	102	1.56	4.89	3.65	.698	High
SOC	102	1.50	5.00	3.51	.852	High
AFF	102	2.20	4.83	3.48	.585	High
COG	102	1.64	4.71	3.42	.674	High
COM	102	1.50	4.83	3.34	.691	Medium
MEM	102	1.85	4.33	3.15	.577	Medium

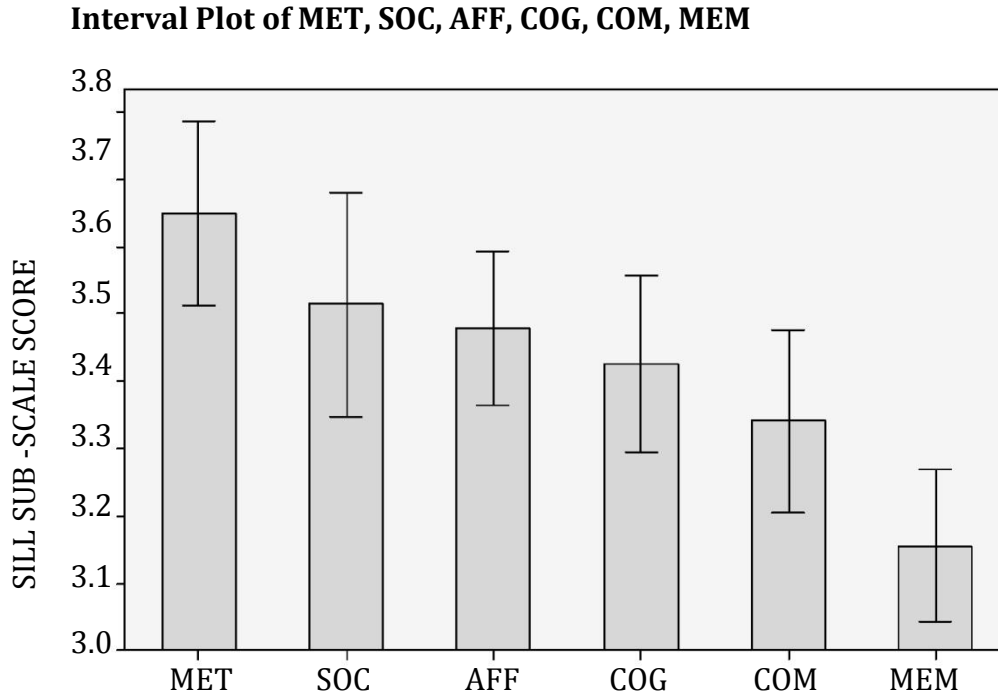


Figure 1. Means \pm 95% Confidence Intervals of the six SILL Sub-Scales

A clear trend was displayed (Figure 1) in which the mean SILL sub-scale scores could be ranked into the following order of learning strategies: 1st = Meta- cognitive (MET); 2nd = Social (SOC); 3rd = Affective (AFF); 4th = Cognitive (COG); 5th = Compensation (COM); and 6th = Memory (MEM). Using the categories suggested by Oxford (1990), the results indicated that the students were, on average, high strategy users with respect to MET, SOC, AFF, and COG, and medium strategy users with respect to COM and MEM.

The ANOVA results (Table 2) indicated that there was a significant difference between the mean SILL sub-scale scores at the .05 level, where $F(5,606) = 7.114, p = .000$.

Table 2
Results of ANOVA to Compare the Means of the six SILL Sub-Scales

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F test statistic ^a	<i>p</i> value
Between Groups	14.420	5	2.884	7.114	.000*
Within Groups	285.180	606	.471		
Total	299.600	611			

Note: * Significant at $p < .05$. ^a Welch's correction applied.

Dunnet's T3 post-hoc test (Table 3) indicated that the mean MEM score was significantly lower than the mean scores for SOC, AFF, MET, and COG at $p < .05$. The mean MET score was significantly higher than the mean scores for MEM and COM. There was no significant difference at the .05 level between the mean scores for MET, SOC, AFF, and COG.

Table 3
Results of Dunnet's T3 Post-Hoc Test to compare the Means of the Six SILL Sub-

Scales

PAIRWISE COMPARISON			
(I)	(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	P value
SUBSCALE	SUBSCALE	(I-J)	
MEM	SOC	-.36	.008*
	AFF	-.33	.001*
	MET	-.49	.000*
	COM	-.19	.438
	COG	-.27	.035*
SOC	MEM	.36	.008*
	AFF	.03	1.000
	MET	-.14	.971
	COM	.17	.828
	COG	.08	1.000

AFF	MEM	.33	.001*
	SOC	-.03	1.000
	MET	-.17	.606
	COM	.14	.854
	COG	.05	1.000

MET	MEM	.49	.000*
	SOC	.14	.971
	AFF	.17	.606
	COM	.31	.026*
	COG	.22	.268

Note: * Significant at $p < .05$

With respect to the frequency of use of the six learning strategies, the minimum and maximum values in Table 16 indicated that all six learning strategies were used to a more or less extent by $N= 102$ students.

In summary, the six learning strategies were used by all of the learners in the sample to some extent. Memory was the least used learning strategy and compensation was used less than the other four learning strategies. The most highly used learning strategies, with no statistically significant differences between them, were metacognitive, social, affective, and cognitive.

5. Discussion

Using the categories suggested by Oxford (1990), it was concluded that the students were, on average, high strategy users with respect to MET, SOC, AFF, and COG, but medium strategy users with respect to COM and MEM.

With respect to RQ1 (What is the general pattern of language learning strategy use among a specific group of Saudi Arabian English-major university students?), the mean MEM score was significantly lower than the mean scores for SOC, AFF, MET, and COG at $p < .05$. There were no significant differences at the .05 level between the mean scores for MET, SOC, AFF, and COG. It was concluded that memory was the least used learning strategy, and compensation was also less frequently used than the other strategies. The most highly used learning strategies, with no significant differences between them, were metacognitive, social, affected, and cognitive. The mean for overall strategy use was moderate. Thus, according to the criteria provided by Oxford (1990) for judging the degree of strategy use (detailed in Table 1), strategies were “sometimes used” by the participants in the current study.

Findings from the survey indicated that the language learning strategy use of Saudi EFL students at the University, as measured by the SILL, was moderate, with an overall mean of 3.41. This finding supports the findings in previous studies. For example, Riazi (2007) reported that the mean of strategy use among 120 female Arabic-speaking Qatari university students was 2.99. It also showed that strategy categories were used in the order of metacognitive, cognitive, compensation, social, memory, and affective. The participants of Riazi’s study also reported a greater tendency to use metacognitive, cognitive, and compensation strategies than social, affective, and memory strategies, which conforms, to a large extent, to the findings of the current research. Similarly, the findings of a recent study conducted by Shamis (2003) support the current research results. Shamis’ study reports on the current English language learning strategies used by Arabic-speaking English-major students enrolled at An-Najah National University in Palestine. The results of Shamis’ study, examining the language learning strategies of a group of Palestinian English-major students, showed that these students were high to medium users of strategies, and that the highest rank was for metacognitive strategies, while the lowest was for compensation strategies. Based on these findings, the

participants in the current study seem to be relatively somehow sophisticated language learning strategy users, using all six categories of strategies at moderate levels. One possible explanation can be offered for this finding is that, these participants studied English in an EFL setting and did not need it for daily survival. Thus, it was not as urgent for them to use most kinds of strategies as it was for learners in an ESL setting (Al-Otaibi, 2004).

With respect to RQ2 (What are the most frequently used and the least frequently used strategies among this group of university EFL learners?), it was concluded that all six language strategies were used by all of the learners to some extent. With regard to each specific category of strategies, the participants in the current study reported using metacognitive strategies more frequently than any other type of strategy. Social strategies were the next most frequently used, followed by affective and cognitive strategies. Finally, compensation strategies and memory strategies were reported as the least frequently used strategies.

Concerning strategy categories, the metacognitive category received the highest rank of use among this group. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, metacognitive strategies involve exercising “executive control” over one’s language learning through planning, monitoring, and evaluating. They are techniques that are used for organizing, planning, focusing, and evaluating one’s learning. In general, these strategies help learners to gain control over their emotions and motivations related to language learning through self-monitoring. A large number of participants in the current study reported the use of metacognitive strategy, such as planning time in their schedules to study English and noticing their mistakes. The adequate metacognitive strategy use implies that this group of students might have incorporated how to successfully plan, organize, and self-monitor their progress in the language learning process. In addition to that, the high use of metacognitive strategies among Taif University English major students is similar to that observed among students from Asian countries such as Japan, China, Korea, and Taiwan, as reported in some of the studies on Asian students (e.g., Sheorey, 1999; Oxford et al., 1990). It also conforms to the findings of a similar study conducted by Shamis (2003). Shamis’ study reported on the language learning strategies used by Arabic-speaking English majors enrolled at An-Najah National University in Palestine. The results of Shamis’ study showed that An-Najah English

majors used learning strategies with high to medium frequency, and that the highest rank (79.6%) was for metacognitive strategies. This finding can be attributed to the recent trends in the Arabic education system. Recently, instructors and students in non-Western countries have been departing from rote learning requiring memorization of factual knowledge and moving toward deeper approaches to learning requiring higher levels of skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of the instructional materials (Al-Otaibi, 2004).

The next most frequently used strategies among participants in the survey of the study were social strategies. Some studies have established that social strategies are unpopular strategies among Asian students (Noguchi, 1991; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985). This does not hold true in this study. English learners in Saudi Arabia learn English in a setting where English is not used for communicative needs in their social and economic daily lives. As a result, EFL learners are naturally placed in what Kouraogo (1993) called an “input-poor” English learning environment, and they are exposed to inadequate target language input. Furthermore, in EFL contexts in Saudi Arabia, English teaching focuses on rote memorization, translation of texts and identification of correct grammatical forms in reading. Students are not encouraged to ask questions (Al-Swelem, 1997). Thus, less frequent use of social strategies is expected. Contrary to the researcher’s expectations, however, social strategies were the second most-preferred strategies by the participants in this study. The majority of the participants used social strategies, such as asking the other person to slow down or to repeat or clarify when they did not understand something in English, to compensate for the lack of meaningful language input. Such social strategies may be used to make up for learners’ deficiencies in listening comprehension. Therefore, it can be said that social strategies basically function as compensation strategies for this population. The high usage of social strategies could also be attributed to the development of multimedia and networking technologies, which have increased students’ exposure to foreign cultures and more English input. Further research should be conducted to find out whether this is the real cause of strategy preference.

According to Oxford (1990), cognitive strategies are typically found to be the most popular strategies with language learners, because these strategies work directly on incoming information when learning a new language. Cognitive strategies help learners

to use all of their mental processes in understanding and using the target language. They include strategies such as repeating, formally practicing with sound system, taking notes, summarizing, and highlighting. Participants of this study reported high use of cognitive strategies with a mean of 3.42. This finding corresponds with the findings of other studies that investigated cognitive strategies (Davis & Abas, 1991; Oh, 1992; and Takeuchi, 1991). Davis and Abas (1991) used the SILL with 64 language faculty at four tertiary institutions in Indonesia. The findings of their research showed high use of cognitive strategies which is similar to the finding of this research. Likewise, the participants of Oh (1992) study, at the National Fisheries University of Pusan, were medium users of cognitive strategies. In contrast, the findings of a study conducted by Toubia (1992), in which he used an Arabic translation of the SILL with over 500 Arab Egyptian university students majoring in a course of preparation to become English teachers, showed extremely low usage of cognitive strategies. Some of the cognitive strategies that students reported using frequently in this research were taking notes, summarizing, practising the sounds of English, and finding patterns in the language. Interestingly, in a study conducted by Ahmed (1988) of 300 Arab Sudanese students of many ages using course notebooks, self-report, observations, and interviews to assess language learning strategies. Fifty strategies were identified, the most common of which were taking notes in the book margin and summarizing. However, in a research done by Red studying strategies of 55 Nepalese university students, textbooks were seen as too valuable to write notes in, as compared with the Sudanese practice of taking notes in book margins (Oxford, 1996).

In comparison with the other strategy categories, compensation and memory strategies were the least frequently used strategies among the participants. Compensation strategies are strategies that enable students to make up for missing knowledge in the process of comprehending or producing the target language.

However, the students were reluctant to use compensation strategies (e.g., they did not use gestures when they had difficulty producing the language), and they did not make up new words when they did not know the right ones. The finding that Taif University students employed compensation strategies less often contrasts with the findings of studies performed by Chang (1991), Yang (1993), and Watanabe (1990), which showed that the compensation category was the highest ranking category. It is natural for

students to make greater use of compensation strategies, as these can allow them to guess the meaning of what they have heard or read or to remain in the conversation despite their limited grammatical and vocabulary knowledge. However, the participants in the current study reported that they use compensation strategies, such as guessing, either to understand unfamiliar English words or to predict what the other person would say next in English. The participants' focus on guessing strategies may be a reflection of the fact that exams are emphasised at the students' University curriculum. The students at this school may have been encouraged to make guesses whenever needed to successfully complete important exams.

Memory strategies were found to be the least used strategies among the participants. Oxford (1990) regarded memory strategies as a powerful mental tool. However, in the current study, the participants reported memory strategies as their least frequently used kind of strategies. This finding seems to be in contradiction with the popular belief that Saudi students prefer strategies involving memorization, as favoured by Qur'anic education (Al-Swelem, 1997). A likely explanation for this contradiction is that the rote memorization that Saudi students are believed to prefer might differ from the specific memory techniques reported in the SILL. These techniques included making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used; using rhymes to remember new words; and connecting the sound of a new English word and an image of the word to help remember the word. In other words, the memory strategies considered effective involve an imaginative component as well as memory. It is possible that the participants in the current study were not familiar with these mnemonics or specific techniques to enhance their memory, and therefore they reported using fewer memory strategies.

5.1. Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This study had some limitations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. First, all of the participants of the study were female Saudi students. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings to other ethnic populations. It should be noted that in this study, the number of participants was limited to those who voluntarily participated in the study. Thus, the generalization of the findings to a larger population with different native languages or cultural backgrounds may be limited. However, for the purpose of instructional implications, it

is possible to apply some of the results to similar contexts. Second, the data were collected through a self-report instrument that may reflect personal perceptions rather than students' actual uses of learning strategies. Future research on language learning strategies may benefit from other data collection procedures, including verbal protocols and observations, in addition to self-report questionnaires. Also, it would have been better if the SILL questionnaire had been translated into Arabic to avoid any language barrier issues on the part of the students.

Apart from the limitations, the overall findings of this study are consistent with studies carried out in other contexts showing that students tend to stick to language learning strategies in the process of their language learning in university programs.

Therefore, it is plausible to think of language learning strategies as a salient learner variable to be considered both theoretically and pedagogically.

The findings of the present study suggest a number of implications for Saudi EFL instruction at the University in which the study was conducted. The finding of a low-medium overall mean of strategy use in the current study indicates that the Saudi EFL students at the University were not aware of the available strategies at their disposal, and hence were not applying the full range of appropriate strategies. Therefore, it is important for teachers to raise students' awareness of the broad range of strategy options available to them. The resulting awareness and expansion of strategy use may improve students' motivation and, thus, can help them to become more self-confident and successful language learners. It is also important to encourage students to find their own ways of overcoming the constraints on language learning and use in their learning environment. These ways may include making efforts to find and communicate with native speakers online, participating in English mailing lists on topics of interest to students, and other similar activities.

In the current study, compensation strategies were reported as the least frequently used strategies. Thus, this result might suggest that compensation strategies should be emphasised more among this population. Teachers should encourage students to overcome their learning obstacles and compensate for the absence of language knowledge through the use of strategies such as guessing intelligently, using synonyms,

and predicting responses.

As obtained in the survey, metacognitive strategies were reported as moderately high used strategies in this population. However, the overall mean was still low compared to other groups of learners in other countries. Therefore, teachers should train students in the effective use of metacognitive strategies, such as planning, organizing, and evaluating their own learning. Teachers should also ask students to plan a language learning schedule and encourage them to discuss and share these in the classroom. Moreover, teachers can assist students in shaping their own learning goals and taking steps to achieve these goals.

The mean of 3.43 for cognitive strategies suggests that the participants may not perform optimally in terms of their cognitive skills in a language classroom. As various researchers have emphasised the importance of cognitive strategies in language learning, these strategies should be introduced to the University EFL students as a fundamental tool in language learning in order to improve their English proficiency. For example, teachers can demonstrate how to analyse the structure of English or how to recognise and use formulas and patterns in English, thus encouraging students to employ these strategies to a greater extent.

The extremely low use of memory strategies in the current study implies that classroom strategy training should particularly emphasise more memory strategies, such as specific memory techniques and systematic mnemonics. Teachers can demonstrate strategies such as using rhymes and flash cards to memorize new vocabulary. The use of these memory strategies might help learners to improve their mental processes in learning English.

All of these recommendations are presented with the intent of facilitating the development of more confident, more strategic, and especially more successful language learners in Saudi Arabia.

In summary, language learning strategies may be accommodated into both teaching materials and classroom teaching and learning activities in the immediate context of this study, as well as in similar ESL/EFL settings. Students should be given more opportunities to learn about and use language learning strategies. Exposing students to

these strategies regularly may enable them to use the strategies more efficiently in the process of their language learning. The teacher's role in helping students to become familiar with and use language learning strategies is important. The teacher should learn about the students, particularly about their interests, motivations, and learning styles. The teacher can determine what language learning strategies his/her students appear to be using by observing their behaviour in class. The language teacher should provide a wide range of learning strategies in order to fulfil different learning styles that meet the needs and expectations of the students. This requires some kind of strategy training that may be tailored to the practiced syllabus.

Research should be replicated so that more consistent information becomes available within and across groups of learners. Particularly important is information on how students from different cultural backgrounds use language learning strategies.

More research on factors affecting strategy choice would be helpful. Learning style is an important factor, along with gender, age, nationality or ethnicity, beliefs, previous educational and cultural experiences, and learning goals. Additionally, it is likely that different kinds of learners (e.g., analytic vs. global or visual vs. auditory) might benefit from different modes of strategy training.

Although international research community has produced innumerable research studies on the use of LLSs, the EFL research community remains in the early stage in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the researcher highly recommends that administrators across the Kingdom to encourage their faculty to get involved in action research. It is time to discover how Saudi EFL students are different from EFL students in other international studies, and to discover how they are similar to other language learners across the world.

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