

# Enhancing English Language Proficiency at Vocational Education Schools Through the Implementation of Language Learning Strategies Measured by the TOEFL Mock Test Nadhim Madhlloom Hashim ALI\* The General Directorate of Education in Thi-Qar/ Ministry of Education

Article Info	Abstract
<p>Date of Article</p> <p>Received : 2024/7/9</p> <p>Received in revised form: 2024/9/11</p> <p>Accepted: 2024/10/7</p> <p>Available online: 2024/10/9</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p>Vocational education schools, gender, language learning strategies, TOEFL mock test.</p>	<p>The current study explores the impact of teaching English language in a vocational education context by evaluating the implementation of language learning strategies (LLS) by using a TOEFL mock test. To accomplish the aims of this study, 80 students from Vocational Education Schools (VES) were engaged to respond to the Oxford Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (OSILL). The findings indicate that the differences between gender and the six parts of OSILL reveal that neither males nor females are statistically significant in any of these strategies when employed in academic English learning contexts; the significance value is <math>p &lt; 0.05</math>. A strong positive correlation exists between the two parts of OSILL strategies and English language proficiency. Memory strategies significantly correlate with the language proficiency of the (TOEFL) test: Pearson Chi-Square <math>\chi^2 (1,79) = .293</math>, <math>p &lt; 0.05</math>, Cognitive strategies demonstrate a high positive association with TOEFL among the EFL students <math>\chi^2 (1,79) = .378</math>, <math>p &lt; 0.05</math>. The findings draw attention to the importance of learning strategies in enhancing students' understanding of foreign languages and facilitating the learning process. The experimental findings of this study provide a unique perspective on integrating direct and indirect learning strategies in the formal setting. Students can improve their language proficiency and excel in various contexts of learning. Developing an efficient academic environment is closely related to future research on language learning in VES.</p>

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## Introduction

The core of this study attempts to demonstrate the value of investigating students' LLSs when attempting to learn new information in foreign language contexts. Learners fundamentally employ these strategies to enhance the enjoyment of learning a new language, directly or indirectly

impacting student self-regulation's primary goal (Oxford 2011). This indicates the necessity of employing LLS to alleviate EFL students' challenges in enhancing their English language proficiency for both academic achievement and everyday use. Therefore, it provides an essential contribution by

demonstrating the effect and the relationship of the independent variables, namely English language proficiency and gender, and their impact on the student's cognitive development and English proficiency achievement.

Language learning strategies (LLS) potentially benefit students who are actively learning a new language. LLS is a technique or method that enhances learning new information and improves the opportunity for success. Brown (2002) defines strategies as multiple "attacks" employed to address a particular problem, which differ significantly among individuals. Brown (2000) conducted a study demonstrating that the selection of learning strategies varies among learners to enhance their language proficiency in diverse learning contexts, which can directly and indirectly influence their learning. Moreover, Oxford (2016) emphasises that language proficiency will be enhanced if a learner converses with native speakers. Furthermore, Chamot (2005) broadly defines strategies as methods that aid in completing a learning task.

LLSs are generally purposeful and deliberate, and each strategy serves as a guiding step, providing sufficient support to assist a student in navigating a successful learning experience. Similarly, these strategies can be implemented to aid a student in acquiring proficiency in a new language by utilizing the most commonly employed techniques in the target language (Chamot and Harris, 2019). LLSs, commonly identified as specific behaviors, thoughts, steps, techniques, and tactics, are employed by students to enhance their understanding of a language (Griffiths, 2003; Oxford, 1990).

Oxford (1990) created the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which is

utilised in language acquisition. Numerous studies globally have validated its reliability and applicability in formal pedagogy (Thomas and Rose, 2019). SILL encompasses six strategies typically categorised as direct and indirect. The initial category of strategies encompasses cognitive, compensatory, and memory strategies. The latter category is relevant to indirect strategies, which include metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Learners of varying proficiency levels typically select diverse strategies during the learning process due to their access to various educational resources and environments. This enables students to choose the strategy they have successfully enhanced to meet their needs at school. In such a scenario, the teacher is the leading player and is responsible for developing further assistance for his students. They are responsible for implementing a strategy to optimise proficiency development in the classroom (Brownlie, Feniak et al. 2006).

### 1.1. Problem of the Study

Most notably, in VES' teaching and learning processes, LLS significantly facilitates students' learning. Despite this, English proficiency contexts restrict this capacity to apply knowledge and acquire new skills. The association between a student's English proficiency and LLSs holds significance for an enjoyable language learning process. However, if these strategies are poorly formulated without suitable procedures, the objective may not be successfully accomplished. (Bhuvaneshwar 2017).

It is apparent that most students in VES who employ LLS do so to achieve high grades and success rather than to learn and master the

target language efficiently. As a result, this study sheds new light on the significant achievement of English language contexts. This shows a need to use LLS to reduce the difficulties encountered by EFL students in boosting their mastery of the English language for academic success and everyday use. Insufficient English proficiency renders the learner relying on the teacher for academic achievement even when this reliance is inappropriate (Kamper, Mahlobo et al. 2003). Additionally, gender is critical when learning a foreign language to determine how males and females learn English and assess the unique roles that English learning plays for male and female students. Since gender is regarded as the cultural, social, and psychological notions imposed on gender (McElhinny 2014), teachers can directly impact gender differentiation by providing exceptional learning opportunities for students in VES.

### 1.2. Research Questions

The study endeavors to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the influence of gender on the LLS employed by EFL students?
2. How does LLS affect the English language proficiency of EFL students when investigated by using OSILL?

### 1.3. Objectives of the Study

The study highlights the following objectives:

1. Identifying the role of gender and its effects on LLS used by EFL students.
2. Determining the impact of LLS on EFL learners' proficiency while fulfilling learning tasks.

### 1.4 Limitations

The study was limited to the following items:

1. The vocational education level is equivalent to pre-university English language proficiency.
2. A study employed the Oxford OSILL questionnaire scale for data collection.
3. All the schools granted permission to participate in this research were in Thi-Qar, Iraq.
- 4- The ages of the participants span from 18 to 20 years.

### 2. Literature Review

In the early seventeenth century, the term "strategy" was used to refer to skilled people's work that was more accurate and successful than that of the untrained ones. It is also worth noting that the word "strategy" comes from "stratēgos" Greek tactics, which means "army" (Wang 2018). Therefore, it seems that "strategy" stands for the science of forming military forces' movement to achieve a war plan of victory. Besides, strategy is the art of creating compatible military plans and the capabilities of the state. In education, learning strategies are essential for students as they can influence their self-esteem in learning, picking, coordinating, and engaging with new information in the target language, as indicated by (Ghani (2003), (Chamot 2004); Paige, Cohen et al. (2006). Furthermore, According to Oxford and Crookall (1989), LLSs are defined as "actions, behaviors, steps, and techniques" employed by learners to improve the learning process, as cited in (Hardan 2013). In another vein, Ghani (2003) defined LLSs as specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students commonly employ to enhance their language proficiency involving storage and retrieval in a new language.

Over the last thirty years, EFL students' learning strategies have been intensively

researched using various language learning tools. Most studies addressed language development from a cognitive psychologist's perspective, identifying learning as an activity that leads to measurable, observable changes in behavior Finney (2002); Macaro (2006); Williams and Mercer (2016); and Oxford (2017). However, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is still one of the most widely used instruments in research on language learner strategies (White, Schramm et al. 2007). Learning tasks are performed through a student's engagement in the target language to facilitate the educational process, which reflects the potential influence of LLS on enhancing ESL/EFL learning through these strategies in an academic context (Fewell 2010).

Several studies have highlighted the importance of learning strategies used to improve a more effective learning cycle, such as Oxford (1990); Wenden (1991); Stern (1992); Mingyuan (2001); Paige, Cohen et al. (2006); Fewell (2010); Chamot and Harris (2019). These strategies have shown traits of proficient language learners and compared the strategies of more and less successful language learners in learning (Chamot 2005). It is widely recognised as an essential strategy closely related to language development, making it easier for learners to incorporate practice, store knowledge, and use it again in different learning situations. These strategies have sought to clarify the students' positive actions by introducing two strategies that directly and indirectly influence language learning.

Oxford (1990) seeks to identify the predominant strategies used in learning a new

language, placing them as "good" strategies implemented by successful learners since awareness of these strategies can effectively enhance language learning (Griffiths 2013). Furthermore, Green and Oxford (1995) observe that accomplished learners actively participate in the schooling experience. OSILL aims to investigate students' learning strategies for learning English as a foreign language. Oxford (1990) developed the OSILL in the mid-1980s and published the last version in 1990. OSILL comprises direct and indirect learning strategies, subdivided into six sub-strategies encompassing the essence of LLS.

Moreover, the direct strategies consist of three types of strategy: First, memory strategies are responsible for retrieving information by making a mental link using images and sounds in English contexts in learning activities. Secondly, the cognitive strategies indicate an assimilation and production process of learning. It encourages students to use the foreign language by making notes, analysing, summarising, synthesising, and practicing language expressions. Thirdly, compensatory strategies are used to guess or deduct the correct information for meaning in an unknown technique to solve problems in the target language.

Other types of strategies are indirect and employed to regulate the learning process by encouraging more students to think and discover new knowledge in the target language; they work in harmony with different strategies. These strategies consist of three parts in OSILL: Metacognitive strategies are associated with a student's specific techniques to organise his learning in English depth. It focuses on the learning process through

comprehensive planning, organisation, and evaluation of language skills and effective practices in actual learning tasks. Next are the affective strategies used to control emotion, motivation, and value as factors that significantly affect the learning process. Finally, social strategies are essentially used to communicate with others in the same learning environments where students meet to share thoughts and emotions by asking questions, compassion, and cooperating with others. As a result, these strategies have become the direct integration for enhancing better communication among people to gain a thorough comprehension of the target language.

### 2.1. Gender Differences in Learning

Several studies found that gender can influence how students learn a language significantly, for instance, Oxford, Park-Oh et al. (1993); Gleason and Ely (2002); Aslan (2009); Liyanage and Bartlett (2012); Platsidou and Sipitanou (2015) and Senad, Amna et al. (2021), the majority of these studies were carried out in the field of language teaching and learning. They address notable LLS findings that are frequently observed. However, some of them found that male students use strategies more frequently than females. For instance, Kayaoğlu (2012) argued that the findings suggest that female learners indicated a greater use of strategies. More precisely, females demonstrated a higher level of use of the five primary strategy types, namely "memory, compensation, cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategy". Viriya and Sapsirin (2014) identified no significant difference between male and female participants' learning strategies and that gender

does not affect LLS. Similarly, Lee (2020) observed that the findings revealed no significant differences in the effects of participant gender on strategy use between female and male students in the investigated mode. Ehrman and Oxford (1995) provide an in-depth analysis of gender differences, showing that females prefer a wide range of learning strategies, particularly social strategies. Colley and Todd (2002) confirm that male students performed better in writing, whereas female students excelled in language comprehension, vocabulary, and speech sounds.

Furthermore, Van Der Slik, Van Hout et al. (2015) found that in the context of adult second language acquisition, female language learners benefitted more from higher academic instruction than their male counterparts. Despite the extensive body of research devoted to gender differences in learning, Taguchi (2002) asserts that the evidence regarding the impact of gender disparities on the learning tasks of male and female students is uncertain.

### 2.2. The Impact of English Language Proficiency on LLS

Considerable scholarly investigation has examined the correlation between proficiency and learning strategies. There are a number of variations in the strategies learners employ to achieve their personal learning goals and overcome learning barriers in their educational setting. Mutar (2018) noticed that learners with low language proficiency employ a narrow range of strategies; conversely, those with a keen interest in achieving high English proficiency reflect entirely different learning strategies. This is the primary reason numerous learners fail to achieve their personal learning



goals and encounter learning barriers that impede their progress (Henderikx, Kreijns et al. 2019). However, Salahshour, Sharifi et al. (2013) mentioned, in this respect, that the LLS is an essential factor in learning a new language, as it enables a more profound understanding of the processes that learners engage in during the learning process in the target language.

Learners' strategies to achieve personal academic goals and resolve learning challenges vary depending on the association between LLSs and language proficiency. Furthermore, learners' strategies and language proficiency may be directly or indirectly influenced by various variables, which can impact learners' English language proficiency (Soruc, Altay et al. 2021). This is evident in the case of language proficiency, which is influenced by the strategies learners employ to improve the effectiveness of the learning process (Zhou and Rose 2021). language proficiency could employ learning strategies more frequently than those with more excellent proficiency. However, using LLS had a detrimental effect on the support of learner autonomy and the facilitation of learning, whereas self-efficacy was predictive of increased language proficiency (Jaekel 2020). Besides, Ella (2018), in her study, demonstrated that there is no substantial correlation between language proficiency and LLSs. In this scenario, the teacher's role in the learning tasks is significantly influenced by the LLS and English proficiency used in the learning process. As a result, teachers are essential in achieving language proficiency because they can teach these strategies, allowing learners to successfully navigate the learning process and

become successful language learners (Amir 2018).

### 3. Methodology

The Oxford OSILL was used as the primary tool in this study to assess students' unique LLS when learning a foreign language. It addressed the first research question, '*What is the influence of gender on the LLS by EFL students?*'. Additionally, it is adopted to investigate the relationship between gender and English proficiency as influencing factors during the learning cycle. Consequently, a proficiency test (TOEFL) addressed the second research question, '*How does LLS affect the English language proficiency of EFL students when investigated by using OSILL?*'. This study was conducted at VES during the academic year 2023-2024 in Thi-Qar province.

#### 3.1. Sample of the Study

The study sample comprised 80 participants from vocational education schools studying English for specific purposes (ESP). To investigate the learners' perceptions of using LLS for English learning in a formal setting, the selected participants completed the OSILL (1990) questionnaire. The participants were selected randomly from the third class of vocational education schools (pre-university level). The participants were categorised into 43 (54%) male and 37 (46%) female participants distributed among the selected schools.

Table 3.1. The participants' information on the sample size

The Central Office	Participants Gender		English Proficiency
	Male	Female	Vocational Education
Thi-Qar			

					Schools
Iraq	43	54%	37	46%	3 <sup>rd</sup> class

Table 3.1. establishes the characteristics that identify the items that comprise the sample size according to the formula established by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Thus, the sampling size proposed by Krejcie and Morgan is a widely employed method to determine the appropriate number of samples for studies. It aids in determining the sample size required to make precise statistical inferences about the population. Consequently, 80 EFL Iraqi students were chosen for this study out of 100 students. Each sample member is equally likely to be chosen for the sample. The demographic characteristics of the social and cultural background and language proficiency target the VES in Thi-Qar province.

### 3.2. Instruments and Procedures

The procedures of the current study were carried out within the framework to enhance participant engagement. The informed consent form stated that the choice of vocational students to participate in the study was entirely their own, and they were only required to provide their gender, age, and any relevant personal information in lieu of their names. This Arabic version of the OSILL questionnaire was submitted to English teaching and learning experts to verify the instrument's validity and reliability. After getting approval from the educational headquarters to administer Oxford's OSILL questionnaire to students, data was collected for experimental analysis.

Oxford (1990) developed the SILL questionnaire (version 7.0), which includes 50 items describing LLS. As part of the OSILL items, participants could select one of five

Likert scale responses regarding using LLS to learn English in a formal setting. The OSILL questionnaire divides LLS into six categories; each category contains strategies that perform similarly to those listed in Table 2.

In this context, the first instrument comprised six learning strategies assessed by the OSILL: "memory", "cognitive", "compensation", "metacognitive", "affective", and "social". The Arabic version of OSILL allows EFL students to answer questions in their primary language for clarity and ease of answering. Each item describes a language learning strategy, and participants were required to respond to the items by selecting one of the provided options to indicate the frequency with which they employ these strategies in learning.

The OSILL instrument uses a 5-point Likert scale type questionnaire with the following options: (1) *"Never or almost never true of me"*; (2) *"Usually not true of me"*; (3) *"Somewhat true of me"*; (4) *"Usually true of me"*; and (5) *"Always or almost always true of me"*. The OSILL instrument (version 7) includes the 50-item strategy that examines how many students use the six parts of LLS: Items (1-9) "Memory strategies"; Items (10-23) "Cognitive strategies"; Items (24-29) "Compensatory strategies"; Items (30-38) "Metacognitive strategies"; Items (39-44) "Affective strategies"; and Items (45-50) "Social strategies". These items describe the strategy EFL Iraqi students use to learn English efficiently.

The second instrument was the proficiency test (Online TOEFL mock test), namely the "Test of English as a Foreign Language", an international standardised test designed to assess the English language proficiency of

candidates who are not native English speakers. The TOEFL test enables students to demonstrate proficiency in English. The four academic English skills can be measured and evaluated, including “listening”, “reading”, “speaking”, and “writing”. It was used to examine the participants' English proficiency in vocational education schools during the first half of the 2023-2024 academic year.

Therefore, this assessment evaluates the LLS mechanisms employed when studying English in the official setting. In particular, it demonstrates the effects of this test on the strategy used to develop English knowledge and skills efficiently. It consists of four language skills, including speaking and listening, which are identical across the two tests; however, the content of the reading and writing sections differs based on which test the student undertakes. All TOEFL's “listening”, “reading”, “speaking”, and “writing” sections are completed on the same day, without any interruptions to be conducted. Alternatively, the speaking section can be finished within one week before or after completing the other tests. The collected scores were utilized to determine how well their proficiency in the four language skills was impacted.

Furthermore, the TOEFL test was used in this study to determine the students' academic proficiency, and the TOEFL practice test, the most widely used English language proficiency assessment, was analysed. Additionally, it ensures the correlation between the LLS and proficiency in four fundamental English language skills: “reading comprehension”, “listening comprehension”, “sentence structure”, and “written speech”. To enter university, students must pass English

proficiency tests at the last vocational education level. The primary purpose of proficiency is to distinguish good and poor language students and improve their learning skills in the target language (Green and Oxford 1995). It concentrated on identifying parallels between learning strategies and language proficiency and proposed that good students employed LLS more frequently than poor language learners.

The reliability of the translated OSILL questionnaire for use in the study was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. It is a measure that assesses the degree of internal consistency within a set of items. Assessing the degree of shared variance among the parts of an instrument must demonstrate reliability before initiating the study procedures. The teachers and researcher conducting the study assisted the participants in completing the questionnaire form by describing the six components of the OSILL. The Oxford reliability confidence of items is 85% as a statistical value of accepting the study's reliability. Data collection at this stage is accomplished using the OSILL questionnaire (7.0 version) provided by Oxford (1990) for English language students.

To establish a correlation between the implementation of strategies and variables, including learning styles, gender, proficiency, and culture, Chamot (2005) pointed out that OSILL had been employed in research. Similarly, reports show that learning strategies encompass effort regulation, assistance seeking, collaborative learning, and task engagement or concentration on a particular task (Ulstad, Halvari et al. 2016).



Oxford (1990) categorised LLSs into two primary divisions: direct and indirect strategies. The direct strategy includes the manner in which students engage in focused language learning, encompassing mental processes in the target language, including (a) memory, (b) cognitive strategies, and (c) compensation strategies. The indirect strategy includes universal learning and broadly comprises (a) metacognitive strategies, (b) affective strategies, and (c) social strategies. The SILL employs a selection of five Likert-scale responses for each strategy. The table below outlines the fundamental roles of each strategy, accompanied by descriptions of their implementation in classroom activities.

Table 3.2. Parts of language learning strategies

Direct Strategies	Memory Cognitive Compensation	Items 1-9 Items 10-23 Items 24-29	Part A Part B Part C	Enhancing memory retention" Utilizing all cognitive processes Managing the lack of information
Indirect Strategies	Metacognitive Affective Social	Items 30-38 Items 39-44 Items 45-50	Part D Part E Part F	Organising the learning Emotional management Collaborative learning

As explained in Table 3.2, OSILL is a tool for data collection to investigate the LLS adopted by Iraqi EFL students in an effort to enhance their linguistic skills. In other words, it is a standardised questionnaire that seeks to determine how frequently students use different techniques for language learning. Therefore, Chamot (2005) asserts that SILL is

a standard metric and emphasises that the most descriptive studies are of greater significance. Questionnaires serve as a successful method of collecting data from participants due to the absence of a close connection between researchers and participants in a study (Fox, Hunn et al. 2007).

### 3.3. Results and Discussion

One of the primary objectives of this study is to examine a correlation between strategy use and achievement, focusing on the LLS employed by students. The other objective is to determine the differences in strategy use according to gender and its effect on students' English achievement based on the psychological influence on EFL students' ability to learn. The value of gender differences is vital in assisting teachers in mastering the relationship between the strategy used based on the variation between males and females to improve their English proficiency effectively.

The participants' responses suggested a correlation between EFL students' proficiency and approach. The frequency distribution illustrated the prevalence of EFL learners implementing the LLS established in Oxford OSILL.

Table 3.3. Overall descriptive statistics of the strategy used in learning by gender

Strategy Model	Gender	N	Mean	STD	df	F	Sig.
Memory	Male	43	3.96	.380	1	.687	.410
	Female	37	4.02	.311	78		
Cognitive	Male	43	3.42	.369	1	.742	.392
	Female	37	3.48	.346	78		
Compensation	Male	43	3.44	.392	1	1.06	.304
	Female	37	3.34	.470	78		

	Total	80	3.40	.430	79		
Metacognitive	Male	43	3.66	.464	1	.382	.538
	Female	37	3.60	.415	78		
Affective	Male	43	3.37	.572	1	1.45	.231
	Female	37	3.31	.599	78		
Social	Male	43	3.45	.499	1	.056	.813
	Female	37	3.48	.550	78		

As presented in Table 3.3., the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the overall mean scores for the six sections of OSILL did not differ statistically significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ). To answer the first research question, 'What is the influence of gender on the LLS employed by EFL students?' the one-way ANOVA test reveals no strong positive relationship between gender and the six parts of LLS. The mean scores of LLS indicate that male and female participants mainly used 'memory strategies' to learn English. Besides, the male participant used all three indirect LLS, mainly 'metacognitive', 'affective', and 'social'. Female students tend to use direct learning represented by 'memory' and 'cognitive strategies' more through mean differences; however, there is no statistical significance between males and females. However, the F-value obtained from ANOVA for gender differences between and within groups and LLS is not statistically significant (.410, 392, 304, 538, 231, 813),  $p < 0.05$  (Table 3.3).

Furthermore, the results show that male and female participants are somewhat equal in using learning strategies, and neither the F value nor Sig is significant. For instance, memory strategies )males ( $M=3.96$ ,  $SD=.380$ ) and (females ( $M=4.02$ ,  $SD=.311$ ),  $f(1,79)=.687$ , cognitive strategies (males  $M=3.42$ ,  $SD=.369$ ) and (females  $M=3.48$ ,  $SD=.346$ ),  $f(1,79)=.742$ , compensation

strategies (males  $M=3.44$ ,  $SD=.392$ ) and females ( $M=3.34$ ,  $SD=.470$ ),  $f(1,79)=1.06$ , metacognitive strategies (males  $M=3.66$ ,  $SD=.464$ ), and (females  $M=3.60$ ,  $SD=.415$ ),  $f(1,79) = .382$ , affective strategies (males  $M=3.37$ ,  $SD=.572$ ) and (females  $M=3.31$ ,  $SD=.599$ ),  $f(1,79) = 1.45$ , and social strategies (males  $M=3.45$ ,  $SD=.499$ ) and females  $M=3.48$ ,  $SD=.550$ ),  $f(1,79) = .056$ .

The results indicate that the student's academic performance in the learning process is not significantly influenced by gender. Hence, it is evident that none of these strategies were employed considerably by either males or females across the six components of LLS. Using different LLS in the classroom is closely associated with the male-dominated students in VES. Female students show less self-esteem progress when disclosing their LLSs due to the complexity of cultural norms in Iraqi society. In this context, the limited opportunities for female educational opportunities were reflected in the form of social norms inherited by society as cultural constants formed by culture and the shifts they encountered Karrar (2021). However, male students benefit from exposure to educational settings by contemplatively selecting their peers. It can thus be suggested that the findings of this study are not associated with other studies stating that female students use strategies more frequently than male students (e.g., Green and Oxford (1995); Embi (2000); Chen (2005); Hejazi and Omid (2008); Zeynali (2012)). The statistical analysis shows that these types of LLS do not significantly influence male and female students. It is a fact that within the same classroom, these EFL students have no significant learning strategies and varying

knowledge of strategies used in formal learning.

Simultaneously, the results indicate a greater mean of male and female participants in memory strategies associated with remembering and retrieving information skills for resolving English learning problems and processing new information following previously acquired knowledge, as indicated by the maximum average score that participants appeared to view memory strategies adopted during the learning process in a highly positive light. Additionally, item 6 of the OSILL, which is the highest: *'I use flashcards to remember new English words'* According to the participants, this strategic behaviour indicates the range of strategies used in this category of LLS.

It is apparent from Table 3.3., that participants employed affective strategies, as indicated by the lowest mean score, and neither the F value nor Sig was significant. The primary function of these strategies is to alleviate students' anxiety by relaxing, listening to music, and playing a game to engage in a positive learning attitude with their classmates. Additionally, these strategies address the management of emotions, both positive and negative. The findings of this study indicate no statistically significant relationship between affective strategies and effective participant learning. Moreover, the lowest mean score of affective strategies is represented by item 45 of OSILL, which is *'If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again'*. Such a mean score shows an individual adjustment toward less frequent use of this strategy when learning English as a foreign language.

The results are seen in Table 3.4., summarise the cross-tabulation test between LLS and students' proficiency. It concentrates on Iraqi VES's strategies to boost students' English proficiency. The Pearson Chi-Square test was conducted to analyse the association of the current variables in SPSS as in the following:

Table 3.4. Pearson correlation between TOEFL test and LLS used in learning

		MEM	COG	COM	MET	AFF	SOC
Pearson Value	X <sup>2</sup>	1					
	Sig.						
TOEFL	X <sup>2</sup>	.293**	1				
	Sig.	.000					
TOEFL	X <sup>2</sup>		.378**	1			
	Sig.		.001				
TOEFL	X <sup>2</sup>			.001	1		
	Sig.			.992			
TOEFL	X <sup>2</sup>				.013	1	
	Sig.				.907		
TOEFL	X <sup>2</sup>					.203	1
	Sig.					.071	
TOEFL	X <sup>2</sup>						-.061
	Sig.						.588

\*\* p< .01 \*p<.05

“MEM” refers to memory; “COG” refers to cognitive; “COM” refers to compensation; “MET” refers to metacognitive; “AFF” refers to affective ; “SOC” refers to social strategy

As shown in Table 3.4., the findings indicate that EFL students already use all six learning strategy categories to associate various proficiency levels throughout the learning process. In response to the first research question of the study, *'What is the influence of gender on the LLS employed by EFL students?'*, memory and cognitive LLS show a significant correlation between OSILL parts and proficiency variables since p<0.05. Furthermore, the Pearson correlation test (x<sup>2</sup>)

indicated a positive relationship between the student's English language proficiency and OSILL parts, including memory strategies have a robust positive correlation ( $x^2 (1,79) = .293, p < 0.05$ ). Cognitive strategies have a moderate positive correlation ( $x^2 (1,79) = .378, p < 0.05$ ).

These direct LLS indicate a strong relationship between these two LLS and the proficiency test scores (TOEFL). The Pearson correlation test shows a negative relationship between the student's English language proficiency and other LLS: compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies, which are not significantly correlated with TOEFL scores since the correlation is significant at 0.05. Oxford (1999) and Benjamin, Berger et al. (2018) state that the significance value means the difference between the two ratios is statistically significant between 0.00 and 0.05. It is proposed that the threshold for statistical significance be reduced from 0.05 to 0.005.

As illustrated in Table 3.4., the Pearson correlation shows that memory and cognitive LLS enhance direct learning through various techniques, including repetition, guessing an appropriate context, outlining a necessary meaning, and memorizing additional details in the memory device. The findings of this study indicate that most participants employed two LLSs since they were unfamiliar with each other to develop their knowledge in foreign contexts. Most participants achieved considerable mastery on the English proficiency test by employing only two strategies: memory and cognitive. This failure may result from teachers not effectively preparing their students for this classroom learning. Besides, teachers did not provide

adequate opportunities for students to effectively identify themselves in self-regulation learning.

In response to the second research question, memory, and cognitive LLS demonstrate a strong association between OSILL parts and the proficiency test at  $p < 0.05$ . The Pearson correlation test ( $x^2$ ) also revealed a positive link between students' English language proficiency and OSILL parts, including memory strategies  $x^2 (1,79) = .293, p < 0.05$  and cognitive strategies  $x^2 (1,79) = .378, p < 0.05$ . The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates a negative correlation between participants' English proficiency and other LLS, including compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. These strategies are not significantly correlated with TOEFL scores at the 0.05 level. According to Oxford (1999) and Berger et al. (2018), a significance value indicates that the difference between the two coefficients is statistically significant at the 0.00 to 0.05 level.

In summary, most participants used memory and cognitive strategies to significantly master English proficiency by directly learning language skills. Another reason is teachers who did not adequately prepare their students for student-centered orientation in the classroom and provide an insufficient opportunity for indirect learning independently. As a result, these two LLS are used to help students develop their learning skills in the target language based on the mental process in the brain.

### 3.4. The Linear Regression Between OSILL and Proficiency Test (TOEFL)

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between the strategy

use and TOEFL scores, using SPSS for descriptive statistics to clarify the relationship between the predictor variables (LLS) and responder variables (TOEFL). Linear regression predicts these variables and demonstrates a significant positive relationship between "TOEFL scores" and "strategy use" in English language learning.

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

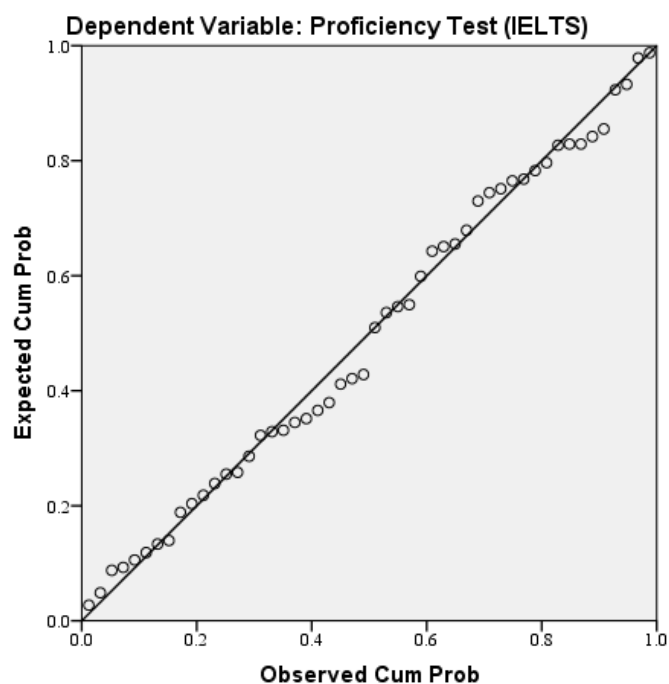


Figure 3.1. Simple linear regression between OSILL and proficiency test (TOEFL)

The findings emphasise the importance of LLS in aiding learning and increasing students' linguistic awareness. Due to these findings, future studies on English language learning may substantially impact student's achievement in the target language. The regression analysis was performed to predict an independent variable, TOEFL scores, and the independent variable, OSILL strategies, as shown in Figure 3.1. Correlation coefficients are visible in the findings, indicating that some independent variables are strongly connected

with the dependent variable. As a result, the residuals of the regression model are effectively centered on zero. Simple linear regression (Enter) was used to discover the most strongly connected LLS with English proficiency.

The regression findings indicate that the mean of all variables associated with English proficiency is strongly associated with English proficiency, as illustrated in Table 3.4. LLS has simple linear regression coefficients  $f(1,79)=2.714=.002$ ,  $p<0.05$ ,  $x^2=.524$ ,  $x^2\text{Adjusted}=.173$ . As illustrated in Figure 3.1., a scatterplot indicates that some data do not necessarily imply a linear relationship, but rather the scatter of data points around the fitted regression line in some data closely associated between strategy use and TOEFL scores such as memory and cognitive strategies. Thus, the findings of simple linear regression indicate a positive correlation between the degree of the linear relationship between the predictor and responder variables. To summarise, most students who engaged in English language tests during their preparatory academic years are ready to learn efficiently through direct LLS.

#### 4. Conclusion

The current conclusion provides a concise summary of the findings, illustrating the impact of gender and proficiency on the LLS employed by EFL students in vocational education schools. The findings emphasise the importance of using these strategies when learning English as a foreign language since they can effectively develop learning skills. Descriptive statistics indicate that memory and cognitive strategies are the most often employed techniques in the target language for



increasing mental processes. Furthermore, a notable correlation between LLS and English proficiency in vocational education has been observed. Teachers can also benefit from this study by focusing on the relationship between English language proficiency and the strategies used to learn language skills in foreign language contexts. This is because teaching aims to facilitate the learning process in an academic environment.

Consequently, incorporating teachers as guides can facilitate language development, thereby enhancing student skills in classroom settings. As per the results, the direct LLSs suggest a strong association between the proficiency test scores (TOEFL) and these two LLS. Consequently, a significant correlation between OSILL parts and proficiency variables is observed in memory and cognitive LLSs at a level of  $p < 0.05$ .

Conversely, the Pearson correlation test indicates a negative correlation between the student's English language proficiency and other indirect LLSs, such as metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. These strategies are not significantly correlated with TOEFL scores, as the correlation is statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ . As a result, a teacher can assist students in employing indirect strategies that emphasise their awareness, enabling them to investigate, challenge themselves and develop their comprehension of information in the target language. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that language skills significantly impact students' academic progress, and gender does not considerably affect language learning. No statistically significant relationship between these two variables was found. The findings show no significant

difference in gender and LLS because males and females have not been correlated to LLS.

As a result, LLS has been developed into an efficient technique for reflecting English language students' requirements to learn new things in the target language. Constantly searching for new variables that can enhance the learning process and make their English learning more acceptable, LLS can assist students with thinking critically and acquiring new knowledge in target language contexts. In summary, the necessity of future research in the field of English language teaching and learning is facilitated by the significance of LLSs in raising students' awareness and facilitating learning. It promotes the importance of other variables influencing English learning, such as age, curriculum, learning foundations, attitudes, and learning styles, to significantly enhance students' English proficiency.

Further research can be established if the findings of this study are complemented by similar studies in other Iraqi cities, indicating that EFL students at different levels of education have a better understanding of English language learning. The study recommends that strategy use constitutes a further investigation of factors that influence a student's learning. The OSILL is a valuable measurement tool for identifying the strategies used by a large sample of students at different stages of education across various cities to increase learners' awareness of English learning.

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فعالة يرتبط ارتباطاً وثيقاً بالبحوث المستقبلية حول تعلم اللغة في التعليم المهني.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مدارس التعليم المهني، الجنس، استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة، اختبار توفل التجريبي.

تعزيز كفاءة اللغة الإنكليزية في مدارس التعليم المهني من خلال تنفيذ استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة التي تم قياسها باختبار الكفاءة

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#### الخلاصة:

تستكشف الدراسة الحالية تأثير تدريس اللغة الإنكليزية في سياق التعليم المهني من خلال تقييم تنفيذ استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة (LLS) باستخدام اختبار TOEFL التجريبي. ولتحقيق أهداف هذه الدراسة شارك 80 طالباً من مدارس مختلفة في الإجابة على استبانة استراتيجية أكسفورد لتعلم اللغة (OSILL). تشير النتائج إلى أن الاختلافات بين الجنس والأجزاء الستة من استبانة OSILL، التي تشير أنه لا يوجد أي اختلافات لأي مشارك ذكر أو أنثى ذات دلالة إحصائية مع هذه الاستراتيجيات عندما يوظفونها في سياقات تعلم اللغة الإنكليزية الأكاديمية، حيث قيمة الفا المعنوية هي  $P < 0.05$ . وبالمقارنة، توجد هنالك علاقة إيجابية قوية بين جزأين من استبانة استراتيجيات OSILL ومهارة إتقان اللغة الإنكليزية. حيث ترتبط استراتيجيات الذاكرة بشكل كبير مع اختبار الكفاءة اللغوية (TOEFL) حسب قيمة اختبار مربع كاي ( $\chi^2(1,79) = 2.293, p < 0.05$ )، كذلك تُظهر الاستراتيجيات المعرفية ارتباطاً إيجابياً عالياً مع اختبار الكفاءة TOEFL مع طلاب اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية وتظهر قيمة اختبار مربع كاي ( $\chi^2(1,79) = 3.378, p < 0.05$ )، تلفت النتائج الانتباه إلى أهمية استراتيجيات التعلم في تعزيز فهم الطلاب للغات الأجنبية وتسهيل عملية التعلم. توفر النتائج التجريبية لهذه الدراسة منظوراً فريداً حول دمج استراتيجيات التعلم المباشر وغير المباشر في الإطار الأكاديمي، يمكن للطلاب تحسين كفاءتهم اللغوية والتفوق في سياقات التعلم المختلفة. إن تطوير بيئة أكاديمية