

The Use of Language Learning Strategies by Iraqi EFL University Students

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ABSTRACT:

The study examines the learning strategies used by the Iraqi EFL university students needed to learn English language for the study in English Language Department of University of Anbar (UOA), Ramadi, Iraq. The aim of the study is to fill the gap in knowledge on how various EFL students manage to deal with the challenges that face them as they learn English in a foreign context for academic purposes. Only 52 students from the sample size were selected through a random sampling technique and will be used throughout the study. The data was collected using the Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL). From experience and research, the study outlines the challenges faced by learners in an attempt to learn English in a non-native environment, and the way forward towards successful acquisition of English as a foreign language. The study's results showed that, for the most part, the students employed all six of Oxford's (1990) categories of language learning strategies. Memorization, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies are among them. These strategies appear to be directly related to the study participants' developments in English proficiency. Most importantly, the study suggests that for Iraqi EFL students to learn English and participate within society in academic contexts, they must acquire academic language skills in reading English texts.

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Introduction:

English language skills are important to master in the academic context because it is the domain where language is needed to complete an academic work in the disciplines where English is used as the Medium of Instruction (Rose and Thompson, 2020). This is why current investigative thrusts in the arena of language acquisition in the field are concerned with to understanding the development of academic EFL/ESL language acquisition in educational contexts particularly, among university students.

Language proficiency required by university EFL students is an essential determinant of academic achievement. As for the language competence, members of the academic context are supposed to have sufficient and standard academic language proficiency needed to support an academic life. In their learning throughout their respective universities and in employment, students employ language to learn and demonstrate as well as apply their specializations, and express sound and contingent opinions (Neeley, 2001).

Because of the innovations in the area of learning particularly for the second and foreign language, research carried out within this area has shifted more emphasis on the learner's attribute than the teaching method in the past two decades (Mutambik, 2018). It has been

established that advanced education gradually combined key aspects of the language learning process at all levels, improving the quality of teaching and promoting students' autonomy (Sinaga & Pustika, 2021; Collins & Halverson, 2018).

Every learner employs particular learning processes and approaches towards the attainment of language learning goal or outcome (Hubak and Magyar, 2018, Suwanarak, K. 2019, Hubak and Manlar, 2022). Lestari & Wahyudin (2020) opine that the participants' awareness displayed an understanding that it was not genetics that determined success in language learning; they also realize that language learning success does rely greatly on efforts made by the learner individually this is in line with what she has said. Even more people developed a concern of how various students engage and deal with language learning and use due to this.

Oxford (1990) noted that there are six language learning strategies, The first is the direct strategies that are as follows using action, sound and image, rethink the content and making mental links. In the same regard, Wong and Nunan (2011) classify the second category of GSMs as cognitive approaches to the act of communication; they practice sending and receiving messages, assess, and reason as well as structure input and output. The third is compensation strategies that relate to possibilities of guess work and overcoming of speaking and writing hitches. The fourth of these is indirect strategies includes meta cognitive approaches to managing, evaluating and focusing our education. The fifth category is the affective strategies that are actively at work with lessening our anxiety, self-motivations, and managing our temper. The last of the social strategies is comprised in asking questions and working together with other people.

The current study is an effort to contribute towards a broader discourse on how the strategies that defines the learning of the Iraqi EFL students could be identified; but student associated language learning and learning effectiveness could be improved, more so at the undergrad level, by knowing the characteristics, the tools and the strategies of a good learner. The findings of this study will help the educators to identify which strategies of learning a second language are appropriate for EFL students. Further, this work assists students in recognizing effective and ineffective learning processes of them and to improve specific areas of academic performance for learning the second language.

Literature Review:

Oxford (2016) describes language learning strategies as the way, act, process or procedure adopted by the learner to improve his or her understanding of the language. However, in both the areas of applied linguistics and language education the sections and research addressing LLSs has grown considerably with much focus aimed at the learners learning EFL. Adan (2021) established that understanding how EFL students use the learning related LLSs can be useful as regards to curricula, pedagogy and enhanced English language mastery. As the present review is intended to regard the significance of LLSs, historical valuable theories, history and LLSs' effects on EFL, all these aspects are explained comprehensively.

Ungureanu further cites Rubin and Wenden 1987 in which language learning strategies were indicated with an emphasis on the strategic aspect of language acquisition in a more general way. They divided the language learning strategies into two; these are the cognitive strategies of which repetition and summarizing are part of and the metacognitive strategies of which

planning-monitoring and evaluating are part of which Rubin in his study identified as the crucial and used by effective language learners.

Another area of extensive discussion is the categorization of the language learning strategies. The specific identification of the six main domains for Oxford has been recently reanalyzed and reshaped according to the self-regulation theories. As stated by Oxford (2016) they comprised of; metacognitive, meta-affective, metamotivational, and meta-social. Her Taxonomy once again was a focus of many discussions on educators' taxonomy; some theorists, such as Dornyei (2005) and Hajar (2019), posited that the mere count of how often strategies are employed cannot be a key to language acquisition success.

However, language learning strategies researchers have remained focused with regards to conducting quantitative studies on the 'use' of LLS, and its other characteristics such as proficiency, gender, learning style, motivation and attitude (Alhaysony, 2017, Habok & Magyar, 2018, 2019, Radwan, 2022). Oxford's SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) is currently the most used assessment tool for gauging the employ of strategies by L2 learners. This survey has been designed for multicultural and has been translated into many languages of the world. It applies her initial six strategy fields and is grounded on her initial taxonomy. After that, some newly developed and reanalyzed assessment instruments dealing with the processes of effective second language acquisition from different perspectives have been developed by subsequent to her revised classification system (Salehi and Jafari, 2015; Habok and Magyar, 2018b; An et al., 2021).

Identifying which of the strategy types FLL learners employ most often has been the main subject of study (Cohen, 2014 Alhaysony, 2017; Dawadi, 2017; Habok and Magyar, 2020; Habok et al., 2021; Pawlak, 2021). Finally, the research results suggest that participants employed LLS at a moderate level. The least opted for the techniques are the affective and memory while the most opted are the cognitive, metacognitive and compensations strategies. Habok et al. (2021) have defined how and to what extent culturally distinct approaches might be favored. They concurred with the preferred use of metacognitive strategies in both Europe and Asia in the favored application. As for the affective field concerning the preference of the European sample for the use of a lower strategy, certain differences reached a statistically significant level.

The use of application in regard to other factors, in particular, has been under a great deal of debate in prior literature (Platsidou 2014; Rao, 2016; Charoento 2017; Habok and Magyar 2018, 2020). Language achievement was one of the most common used factors and who has been defined and analyzed in dozens of approaches. Some of the existing studies (Raofi et al., 2017; Taheri et al., 2019; An et al., 2021; Malpartida, 2021) focus on the vocabulary proficiency level or achievement test score; the other studies focus on self-esteem (Charoento, 2017; Raofi et al., 2017; Sanchez, 2019) other studies focus on the course marks in language (Habók and Magyar, 2018a)

Consequently, most have revealed that, overall, differentiated efficient learners employ LLS more often than inefficient ones (Rao, 2016; Charoento, 2017). Stating about the performance differences, Roohani (2017) found out that, the students with high success employed higher amount of metacognitive strategies than those with low success whose employment of social strategies was higher. Sanchez (2019) identified that high performing students use social, metacognitive and cognitive strategies at higher level compared to lower performing students.

Some study reports that learners with low, moderate and high EFL proficiency make fair or similar use of LLS (Rianto, 2020).

It is therefore also safe to conclude that research on strategy is also related to other fundamental aspects of attitude to language learning. Nonetheless, very limited numbers of the researchers have designed and used the assessment instruments for the self-regulated process of foreign language learning and measured in terms of attitude. Furthermore, to a greater extent, the research has focused on the strategies used by tertiary samples with higher level of abilities. To address this gap, this study makes a sensitive of the Interplay between lower secondary students' attitude, strategy use and their English language achievement. Though, in line with the hypothesized model based on the literature, Platsidou and Kantaridou, 2014; Habok and Magyar, 2018 we expected that LLS has a positive indirect effect on proficiency, through the participation attitude of the students.

The association between LLSs use and language skills has been studied in very few works. There is some evidence that using strategies and proficiency go together, whereby the effectiveness of a strategy is affected by the student's proficiency with the kind of knowledge being taught. This showed a positive and superb correlation between the Second Language Acquisition and LLS as the case found by Ranjan and Saaverda (2021). They particularly confirmed a significant relationship between second language and cognitive social and compensating behaviors. Furthermore, Platsidou and Kantaridou (2014) showed that learning strategies predict language use in a quasi-significant manner and that they are also capable of predicting perceived language performance. Rao (2016) also highlighted that the use of strategies depends on the English language skill level of the learners whereby higher skill learners use more often than the low skill learners.

Consequently, the strategies create a positive statistically significant change in the proficiency scores according to the attitudes as was discovered by Habok and Magyar (2018). More importantly, all these effects imply so much of the general level of academic achievement. Therefore, in Becirovic, Camacho, and Halalić (2021) we learn that LLS could affect Students' English as A Foreign Language (EFL). In details, it has been emphasized that cognitive factor possessed a great positive relationship with EFL achievement while the other factors did not have an efficient positive effect. Similarly, there was a positive behaviour of the SRL strategies on the students' English learning outcome as discovered by An et al. (2021). Lin et al., (2021) also indicated that learning strategy can affect the degree of performance demonstrated by the student in the literal and inferential comprehension zone.

Based on the available literature on the mode of learning EFL there is a massive improvement in the understanding of the learning strategies of learners. Reflecting upon the theoretical framework, research outcomes and history in understanding the nature of strategies and their application in language learning/ acquisition area, one can derive quite relevant implications reflecting upon the factors that engage strategies and their utilization. Despite that, there are some problems, vast progress is observed regarding learning and using LLSs in total and for language learning specifically.

Research Objective:

The present particular study focuses on identifying and analyzing the learning strategies and policies employed by Iraqi EFL university students to learn and improve their English language skills. Understanding on how to read well and write academically its main goal is to

provide tips and suggestions to people in the academic activities. The study also aims to contribute to improved knowledge on the significance of achieving the right level of reading and writing requirement that would enable the candidate to thrive in a university setting.

Research Question:

The following inquiry is the focus of this study:

What kind of language learning strategies utilized by Iraqi EFL university students in their English language journey?

Research Method:

Participants

The research participants are selected from 220 populations, males and females, second year students studying English Language at University of Anbar. The research participants include 52 students who were selected randomly from the University. The students' ages of the subjects were 19-22 years with the mean age of 20 years. The above respondents had no prior experience of living in English speaking countries nor had some of them had any experience of studying abroad. All the students had previously taken English language in their basic or elementary education in the primary and secondary level. In view of the above, all the participants are Arab native speakers who have never used English in practice other than in classrooms and they have never learned it outside an academic context.

Instrument

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) used in this study in order to examine the various kinds of language learning strategies and the frequency with which students employ them. SILL has a 50-item questionnaire for ESL/ESL learning, developed by Oxford (1990), which was used in this study. SILL of Oxford is one of the most utilized strategies especially in analyses entailing learning strategies. Researchers have indicated that it has been useful in many research endeavors. In this Inventory, language learning strategies are divided into six categories: Memory, cognitive, compensation, affective, metacognitive, and social strategies. In this questionnaire, students were required to respond to 50 questions, using a Likert scale of 1- 5. Consistent with Oxford (1990), a range of 3.5–5 indicates higher use of the strategy, 2.5–3.4 indicates medium use, and 1.0–2.4 indicates low use.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher administered the questionnaire to the students in the classroom. The respondents were explained the following points regarding the adopted questionnaire: The questions are not constructed in an 'Open Ended' format, the questions framed here use a five point Likert Scale – And the students do not have to provide right or wrong answers as perceived in the traditional format. Participants also were informed that information to be provided by them would be used for the study purpose only and confidentiality of the information would be maintained. The recorded data was then analyzed via the software Statistical Packs for Social Sciences (SPSS Statistics 23.0) to determine the frequencies and means man, standard deviation and the demographics of the subjects.

Findings and Discussions :

Some strategies and activities the respondents facilitated were towards the improvement of the acquisition and learning of English language. They include; compensation strategies and social strategies, metacognitive strategies, effective strategies, memory and cognitive strategies. The results revealed that the participants used the six types of strategies likewise as in table 1 below:

Table 1: Language Learning Strategies Used by the Study Respondents

No	Category	Mean
1	Meta-cognitive Strategies	3.67
2	Social Strategies	3.53
3	Compensation Strategies	3.49
4	Effective Strategies	3.37
5	Memory Strategies	3.29
6	Cognitive Strategies	3.18

Table 1 above shows that respondents are used all the strategies in their English language learning. Metacognitive strategies are the ones that students employ the most, whereas Cognitive strategies are the ones that they employ the least. After that, each category is examined to determine which common strategies are employed by the students on a regular basis. According to the analysis of the questionnaire, students mostly used to think of the connection between what they already knew and thing they newly learn in English (4.5) in memory strategies. While they utilized the using of flashcards to remember new words as the least strategy (3.0)

Table No. 2: Memory-Strategies Used by the Respondents

No	Strategy	Mean	SD
1	I consider the relationship between the things I know and the new things I learn in English language.	4.5	0.74
2	I try to remember new English words by using them in sentences.	3.6	0.79
3	I link the utterances of a new English words their images to help remembering them later.	3.5	0.54
4	By making mental pictures, try to remember new English words with life situations where they may be used.	3.2	0.96
5	To remember new English words, I use rhymes.	3.1	0.91
6	To remember new English words, I use flashcards	3.0	0.89
7	I embody new English words physically	3.5	1.06
8	I frequently appraise English lessons.	5.3	0.94
9	I try to remember new English words and phrases by their locations in the page or in the street sign.	3.3	1.21

According to the table above 2, it can be agreed with every student makes suggestions about relating what is learned to past experiences. When we teach them new English words they do not like to use those things like rhymes, flash cards. In an attempt to consolidate the new word in the students' memory, the students are allowed to associate the new word with physical features of environment including buildings, stores and streets. They still learn English in the

conventional techniques that have been used whether they should use a new method of teaching such as the use of flash cards. The previous and current memory strategy with the highest rating is 'I often think about prior knowledge to give meaning of this lesson' with 5.3 The lowest on the other hand is 'To teach new English words I use flashcards'. 2 It can therefore be seen that the studying mechanism hardly changes even with the learners being uninterested in other methods of learning such as use of flash cards as learning aid to remember new English words. Table 3 below shows the findings from the examination of the cognitive strategies for the students provided in the questionnaire:

Table 3: Cognitive Strategies Used by Respondents

No	Strategy	Mean	SD
10	I Write or Say new English words several times	3.3	1.02
11	When I speak, I try to speak like native speakers	3.8	0.91
12	I make a practice of English sounds	4.0	0.89
13	I use the common English words in diverse ways	3.56	0.52
14	I try to initiate the conversations using English language	3.4	0.56
15	I watch TV shows in English language or watching English movies	3.38	0.88
16	I Make some read in English for pleasure	3.35	0.61
17	I use English to write messages, letters, and reports	3.75	0.96
18	I firstly make skimming of English passages before reading them carefully	3.75	1.09
19	I try to find words in my native language like words in English	3.32	0.71
20	I try to look for patterns in English	3.2	0.83
21	I guess the meaning English words by separating it into parts to understand	3.45	0.97
22	I try not to make word by word translation.	3.2	0.58
23	I summarize the information I hear or read	2.9	0.81

Table 3 gives understanding that English pronunciation is practiced frequently by students. They rarely if at all translate what they read or heard into English. Instead of expanding their English Vocabulary, the students manage to get additional uses of already known English words. To avoid thorough reading, some students will rather select to skip read. They prefer trying to translate whole sentences instead of words into words. Thus, the cognitive strategies with the highest score are "I make a practice of English sounds" (4,0) wherein the students advocate for listening to the sound of the English words to enhance their pronunciation and spelling and "I try to look for styles in English" which has the lowest score of (3,2). Also, they attempt not to translate word by word literally, for example, it would be better if they translated the whole sentence (3.2). Table 4 provide the compensations strategies employed by the students.

Table No. 4: Compensation Strategies

No	Strategy	Mean	SD
24	I try to make guesses to understand unknown English words	3.5	0.61
24	I try to use gestures if I cannot express words in conversations.	4.1	0.81
26	I say new words in English when I do not know the correct ones	4.1	1.09
27	I read in English without looking for new words.	2.73	1.08
28	I try to make guesses of what other people will say.	3.3	0.76

29	When I don't understand English words or phrases, I try to use words and phrase of the same meaning.	4.0	0.59
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The most frequently used strategy which is also evident from Table 4 is "If I can't find an English word, I use the word which has the same meaning." and the least effective methods include pupils guessing as a way of understanding meaning of the words commonly used in English. When they do not know the word or when they are in a process of interpreting it, they estimate." When they cannot think during a conversation, they sign. The compensation strategy which received the highest score is compensation strategy number three, which is, "When I don't understand English words or phrases, I try to use words and phrase of the same meaning", which scored 4.0. The lowest score was given to compensation strategy the, number 5 "To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses." Students have other options when they do not comprehend what a word is saying in English and would rather use another phrase, or word more or less with the same meaning. (3.5) He was trying to guess his way to understanding when learning English; the type of exercise helps the student express the meaning of new word to the fullest extent. Table 5 below provides the metacognitive strategies used by the students:

Table No. 5: Meta-cognitive Strategies

No	Strategy	Mean	SD
30	I try use my English in various ways.	3.5	0.62
31	I watch my mistakes in English and try to do better.	3.6	0.51
32	When others speaking in English, I try to listen carefully.	4.03	0.74
33	I try my best to be a better learner of English language.	4.1	0.78
34	To have enough time to study English, I try to make scheduled plans.	3.5	0.69
35	I try to use all opportunities to speak in English with people	4.2	0.88
36	I use opportunities to read in English language.	3.5	0.94
37	I have obvious objectives to develop my English proficiency.	3.45	0.71
38	I follow my progress in English language learning.	3.87	0.53

The table above shows that among all the strategies the subject has adopted a metacognitive strategy score of 4.2 point meant that the subject is more motivated and eager to find out more ways of going about the difficulty encountered when using English. Table 5 on the other hand proves that the least utilized strategy among the students involves attempting to time-table their time so that they allocate adequate time for English study. This is due to strategies they used that enabled them to effectively schedule their many co-curricular activities with study time that started from their second year of study.

Table 6: Affective Strategies

No	Strategy	Mean	SD
39	When I feel anxious of using English, I try to rest.	3.3	0.39
40	I push myself to speak in English even when I make of mistakes in speaking.	3.0	0.54
41	When I do good in using English, I reward myself.	3.21	0.63
42	I observe if I am being nervous when I use using English.	4.1	1.03
43	I record my feelings towards English language learning.	2.7	0.71

44	I tell others about my feelings when I learn English.	3.1	0.94
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It is also as shown on the table below that the affective strategies most frequently enacted by students is observing their case of feeling nervous anytime they use English language (4.1) while the last on the list is to write feelings in a language learning journal (2.7). Still, students persevere in attempting to use English because the classroom atmosphere is non-threatening, and the teacher is most kind. However, as it is not fashionable for people of their generation to pour out their feelings in diaries, students are not banking on the latter to do so.

Table No. 7: Social Strategies Used by Students

No	Strategy	Mean	SD
45	I usually ask the other person to speak slowly when I don't understand	3.9	0.67
46	I ask for corrections from English speakers	3.1	1.01
47	I look for a chance to practice English with others	4.6	0.97
48	I ask English speakers for help	3.3	0.88
49	I use English to ask questions	3.18	0.73
50	I try to understand the culture of English language	2.9	0.63

As shown in Table 7, the most frequently used strategy is "I look for a chance to practice English with others" The second column reveals that this statement has the highest mean score of 4.6, while the last statement "I try to learn about the culture of English speakers." With a score of 2.9 it represents the least popular social strategy of the students that every student is a non-native English speaker and is not used to listening to native speakers speak at a normal rate which may be the case. If you speak more slowly, it will be far easier for them to understand what other people are saying.

The earlier discussed findings reveal that students generally and preferentially use more social rather than affective strategies in learning English. The students are enriched with some specific knowledge and are able to understand English lessons while with other people (Lestari, 2020). It is expected that, when a person speaks in English, the students should also listen as well. Despite the fact that they know that there are individuals out there who speak English more fluent as compared to them they will still seek help when it comes to enhance understanding of the subject. One supposes that the students have a desire to know how to speak English better. As Gilakjani (2011) pointed out, the analyzed case shows how an interaction contributes to the development of language acquisition in learners.

Conclusion:

Undergraduate EFL students' language learning strategies were the focus in the current study. The findings show that students use all of the various kinds of categories of language learning. The students applied Metacognitive strategies the most since the students expressed that they are endeavoring to utilize every possible chance with other people in speaking English language. The most frequently used strategic procedures are accompanied by social, memory, cognitive, compensatory, and affective procedures. An analysis of the students understanding or awareness with reference to their improvement and assistance provided by their peer and learning environment is as follows: Of course, when learners face learning difficulties they do turn to others and ask their friends to help them increase familiarity with

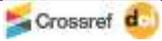
the target language. The findings of this extensive study could be of most use if instructional strategies and tactics are applied across the board in the classroom setting. Furthermore, this research is extendable and may be conducted in multiple research environments and within a number of frameworks. Future work focuses on whether or not there is a significant difference in the use of language learning strategies based on gender, characteristics, motivation, and social background.

استخدام استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة من قبل طلاب الجامعات العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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الكلمات المفتاحية | استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة، طلبة الجامعات العراقيون، المهارات اللغوية، SILL.



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ملخص البحث:

يهدف هذا البحث الى دراسة استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة التي يستخدمها طلاب الجامعات العراقيون الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الأنبار (UOA)، الرمادي، العراق. وتعمل هذه الدراسة على سد الفجوة في المعرفة حول كيفية تمكن طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من التعامل مع التحديات التي تواجههم أثناء تعلمهم اللغة الإنجليزية في بيئة غير ناطقة باللغة ولأغراض أكاديمية. تم اختيار عينة البحث من 52 طالباً فقط من مجموع جمهور الدراسة المستهدف وذلك من خلال أسلوب أخذ العينات العشوائية والتي سيتم استخدامها طوال الدراسة. تم جمع البيانات باستخدام مخزون استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة (SILL) لأكسفورد (1990). ومن خلال الخبرة والبحث، تحدد الدراسة التحديات التي يواجهها المتعلمون في محاولة تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في بيئة غير ناطقة بها، والطريق إلى الأمام نحو اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بنجاح. وقد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أنه في أغلب الأحيان يستخدم الطلاب جميع أنواع استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة الست لأكسفورد (1990). ومن بين تلك الاستراتيجيات هي، الحفظ والإدراك والتعويض والإدراك فوق المعرفي والعاطفي والاجتماعي. ويبدو أن هذه الاستراتيجيات ترتبط ارتباطاً مباشراً بتطورات المشاركين في الدراسة في إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية. والأهم من ذلك، تشير الدراسة إلى أنه لكي يتعلم الطلبة العراقيون الذين يتعلمون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية اللغة ويشاركون في المجتمع في سياقات أكاديمية، يتوجب عليهم اكتساب مهارات اللغة الانجليزية الأكاديمية في قراءة النصوص الإنجليزية.