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United Arab Emirates University
College of Education
Curriculum & Instruction Department
Master of Education Program

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF EFL STUDENTS
IN THE UNIVERSITY GENERAL REQUIREMENTS UNIT
IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES UNIVERSITY

By

Ahmad Zuhair Ahmad Al Khatib

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College of Education

THESIS TITLE

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF EFL STUDENTS
IN THE UNIVERSITY GENERAL REQUIREMENTS UNIT
IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the patterns of English language learning strategies used by Emirati EFL university students, and to examine the effects of gender and proficiency level on the use of these strategies.

This study was conducted at the United Arab Emirates University. The sample consisted of 190 EFL students at the University General Requirements Unit. Data was collected through administering an Arabic translation of Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and a demographic questionnaire.

The findings indicated that these EFL university students were medium range strategy users and that students favored using metacognitive strategies, followed by social, compensation, affective, cognitive and memory strategies, respectively.

Gender and language proficiency levels had no significant effects on strategy use of Emirati EFL university learners, nor did they affect any of each of the six strategy categories.

EFL instructors and curriculum planner might find the results of this study beneficial when designing English language instruction and curriculum plans. However, the findings of this study are exclusive to EFL learners at the UAEU and should not be generalized to include all EFL university learners in the UAE.

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INTRODUCTION

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) places a great emphasis on English language instruction, consequently, in 2007 the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR) introduced the Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA) - an exam of English proficiency - in order to identify students who needed a foundation education, to reinforce their English language skills before pursuing their undergraduate education in public universities (CEPA, 2011). Foundation programs place heavy burdens on the education budget of the country, the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), for example, spends more than third of its budget on the foundation program (Farah & Ridge, 2009).

It is expected that effective language learning strategy training can reduce the time in foundation programs and would lead to substantial budget cuts which can be directed to other areas. Research has also shown that successful learners of English have different strategy patterns than their less successful counterparts. There is a need to specify these strategies, incorporate them into the UAE English curriculum and train less successful learners on making use of them in order to help them become successful learners (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; Wharton, 2000).

Gender is also found to be an important variable which correlates to language learning. Not many studies have been conducted in the UAE and the Gulf region using English Language learning strategy in correlation to gender (Radwan, 2011; Rahimi & Riazi, 2005; Riazi, 2007; Yang, 2010).

Emirati women benefited greatly from the wide- range of educational opportunities offered to them by the State. The ratio of female to male pupils in all education stages up to the secondary stage for the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (the largest Emirate) increased from 95% in the school year 2000/2001 to 98.7% in the year 2009/2010 (Abu Dhabi Statistics Center, 2012).

Although there has been some significant amount of research into strategy use all over the world, not many studies have been conducted within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning contexts, such as the UAE context. The language learning strategy pattern of EFL learners in the Arab world is still largely under-researched and the outcomes of similar studies of other ethnic groups should not be generalized as strategy use of Arab EFL learners in the UAE (Riazi, 2007).

Language learning strategies (LLS) can be defined as “the conscious or semi-conscious thoughts and behaviors used by learners with the explicit goal of improving their knowledge and understanding of a target language” (Cohen, 2003, p. 280). Over the past three decades, LLS have been a topic for intensive research in the areas of foreign and second language acquisition.

Research of English as a foreign language for Arab university learners has always investigated ways, techniques, and/or skills that could help students become better learners of English. Researchers have also noticed that some learners were more successful than others and that these successful learners used what is now called learning strategies (LS) better than less successful learners do.

Statement of the Problem

Not all learners use the same strategies or should be trained on the same strategies as others. Which type of LLSs work best with what learners and in which context still require more research (Hisamoglu, 2000). A huge emphasis has been positioned lately on the research of social, psychological, and affective variables that improve or obstruct language learning. Research has provided evidence that cultural factors; such as beliefs, moral values, traditions, language, and student behaviors such as attitude, motivation, and anxiety correlate with success in language learning (Harumi, 2002; Ok, 2003; Littlewood, 2001).

Despite the great number of research on language learning strategies, there is an apparent scarcity of this type of research within the Arabic EFL context. Limited number of studies (e.g., Shmais, 2003; Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh, & Alshboul, 2010; McMullen, 2009) examined the use of learning strategies by students in the Arab world, with few studies (McMullen, 2009; Riazi, 2007; Radwan, 2011), investigating the use of LLSs in the Arab gulf countries. However, no research on LLSs has been conducted within the context of the UAE.

In the UAE, even though Arabic is the official language, English has a special position and functions as the language of communication with the large population of expatriates working in the UAE. Moreover, English is an obligatory subject from the first grade, and it is the primary medium of instruction at the UAEU. Despite its essential role, many students at UAEU and due to their limited proficiency in English, do not usually perform well in the CEPA, which leads into them being admitted into the University's

foundation education in order to reinforce their English language skills before pursuing their formal undergraduate education in public universities (CEPA, 2011).

Foundation programs heavily burdens the UAEU budget (Farah, & Ridge, 2009), it is expected that effective language learning strategy training can reduce the time and money spent in foundation programs. In addition to that and since there is a considerable body of evidence to support the positive contribution of learning strategies in improvement of learning a foreign language, an investigation of how students in the UAE context employ these strategies seems to be beneficial.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was: 1) to investigate the patterns of English language learning strategies used by students at the University General Requirements Unit (UGRU), and 2) to examine if there were any significant difference in the use of English language learning strategies by gender and proficiency level of students.

Research Questions

This study aimed to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the general patterns of English language learning strategies used by UAEU students at UGRU?
2. Are there any significant differences in the use of English language learning strategies regarding language proficiency between level one (beginning), level two (intermediate) and level three (advanced) UGRU students?
3. Are there any significant differences in the use of English language learning strategies between male and female students?

Significance of the Study

Since the number of studies that examine the overall strategies used by EFL learners and correlation with gender and proficiency at the university level in UAE are scarce, the findings from this research can provide useful pedagogical information to curriculum specialists, in addition to teachers and students. Curriculum specialists can use these findings in developing materials and textbooks for English language instruction. UGRU instructors can also benefit from learning the strategies used by successful and unsuccessful learners in designing lesson plans that consider training learners on these strategies and helping their students become better learners of English. Furthermore, this study will help learners become aware of language learning strategies they often use and develop other learning strategies that might assist them in their language learning. It might also contribute to the scarce literature concerning language learning strategies used by EFL learners in the UAE and the Gulf region.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the complete dependence on Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) to determine strategies use of students. Though this quantitative measure is favorable, the students "may not remember the strategies they have used in the past, may claim to use strategies that in fact they do not use, or they may not understand the strategy descriptions in the questionnaire items" (Chamot, 2004, p. 15) . Therefore, the SILL should be supplemented with other techniques such as think-aloud protocols parallel with a specific learning task, written diaries, stimulated recall interviews, and other methods which might provide richer and more sample-specific data (Radwan, 2011).

Delimitations

Despite the fact that the UAEU have a student population from all over the UAE and is not only from the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, this study was conducted only on students of UAEU and did not investigate learners from other UAE Universities. The other limitation of this study is the possibility that some participant might not have taken the survey seriously, some did not complete all questionnaire items, and others checked the same answer for all survey items. The questionnaires which indicated such issues were removed from the data.

Definition of Terms

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL): a Lickert style paper and pencil survey used to determine strategy use of language learners.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL): English language learning takes place in a non- native English speaking environment where the native language is spoken.

Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA): An English exam which students are required to take before pursuit of undergraduate education in public universities in the UAE.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Language learning strategies can be defined as the ways or skills students use to learn a wide range of subjects. These could be called learning skills, learning to learn skills, thinking skills, and problem solving skills (Oxford, 1990).

The first use of the term “Learning Strategies” appeared in cognitive psychology research in 1956, and in 1966 the term was also used in applied linguistics studies (Hisamoglu, 2000). This was followed in the 1970s by a series of studies about “good” language learners; much of this pioneering work was carried out by researchers such as (Rubin, 1975) and (Stern, 1975), and since then, influenced by developments in cognitive psychology, learning strategies were viewed to be as powerful tools that could foster learning (Griffiths & Parr, 2001). The key concern of research in that area has been on identifying what good language learners report they do when they learn a second language (Shmais, 2003).

Not all learners learn in much the same way; their strategies could be different and these differences and the reasons affecting them have compelled many researchers to attempt to identify the most and least used ones in order to improve students’ language learning (Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh, & Alshboul, 2010). However, Griffiths & Parr (2001) stated that there is no consensus among researchers on the answer to this question.

Consequently, research studies in this area indicated many factors that influence language learning strategy patterns used by language learners, among these are variables such as proficiency (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; Radwan, 2011), gender (Riazi, 2007; Radwan, 2011), learning style (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990), cultural

backgrounds (Abu Shmais, 2003; Rahimi & Riazi, 2005), attitudes (Littlewood, 2001), and motivation (Dornyei, 1990).

Theoretical background

Learning strategies were associated with cognitive theory which was developed from experimental studies of memory, perception, attention and artificial intelligence in an attempt to examine the human thinking process in a way that replicates mental processes of computers (Carlile & Jordan, 2005).

Cognitive science's most basic assumptions about human cognition (thinking) is that humans are processors of information (receptors). The mental operations that encode input information are called processes, while the techniques actually used to handle this incoming input and retrieve the stored information is referred to as cognitive strategies (Wenden, 1987).

Cognitive models of learning view learning as an active and dynamic process where learners choose from received information, encode it to long-term memory, and retrieve it when required (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999). As a result, cognitivists have developed, 'Information processing input-output' models of learning which concentrate on the ways learners gain and encode their knowledge (Carlile & Jordan, 2005).

Figure 1 explains how sensory input might be processed through short-term memory and organized or 'encoded' before being firmly positioned in long-term memory, as learning occurs.

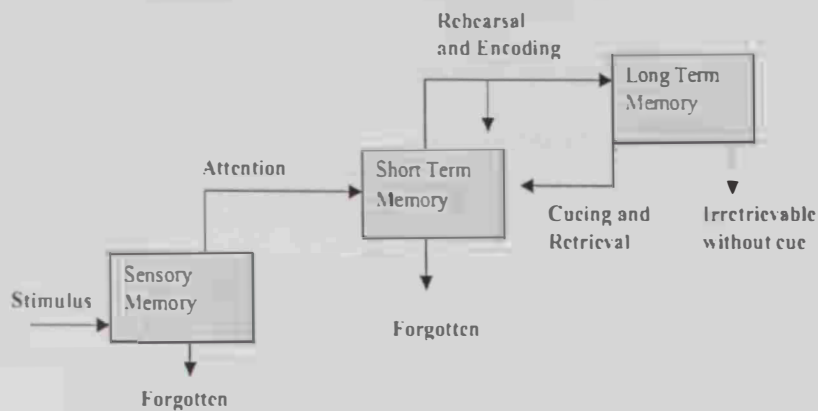


Figure 1 Mental Processing (Carlile & Jordan, 2005:17)

Cognitive theorists in general hypothesize two types of knowledge that is stored in long-term memory: Declarative knowledge, refers to what we know about something such as facts, beliefs, and events. And Procedural knowledge, refers to how we perform, and represents the knowledge of skills and processes such as reading, writing, math, computation, and conducting science experiments (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999).

There have been two main domains of learning theory and research that lay the foundations for strategy instruction and both domains are founded in cognitive learning models: One is the cognitive learning model which concentrates on the “mental processes” of learners. The other one is the social cognitive model which examines the functions of interactions between individuals and group processes while learning. Consequently, three cognitive models emerged within the cognitive paradigm in order to examine how learning strategies function: Information processing, Schema theory, and Constructivism (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999).

Definition of Language Learning Strategies

The term “strategy” has an elusive nature; as it has been referred to as “techniques”, “tactics”, learning skills”, “cognitive abilities”, “problem solving procedures”, “conscious plans”, etc. (Wenden, 1987). The term Language Learning Strategies has been used in psychology, applied linguistics and education all together. In applied linguistics it was associated with the behaviorism theory; in psychology with the mentalist approach, and in education with techniques and devices (Hisamoglu, 2000).

Rubin (1975) as one of the earliest researchers in the field provided a broad definition of learning strategies as “the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge” (p.43). O’Malley & Chamot (1990) defined learning strategies as “special ways of processing information that enhance comprehension, learning or retention of information” (p. 1). Oxford (1990) defined learning strategies as “specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques students use—often consciously—to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing, and using the L2” (p. 1). Stern (1992) defined learning strategies as “learning strategies can be regarded as broadly conceived intentional directions and learning techniques.” (p. 261). Cohen (1998) defined them as “learning processes which are consciously selected by the learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning of a second or foreign language, through the storage retention, recall, and application of information about that language” (p. 4). Chamot (2004) defined them as “The conscious thoughts and actions that learners take in order to achieve a learning goal” (p. 14).

Classification of Language Learning Strategies

Grounds for classifying language learning strategies are rooted in research of second and foreign language learning in addition to cognitive psychology. Many researchers have attempted to classify Language Learning Strategies (Wenden & Rubin, 1987; O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzares, Kupper, & Russo, 1985; Oxford, 1990; Stern, 1992; Ellis, 1994).

Stern (1975) classified strategies of good language learners into ten categories: planning, active, emphatic, formal, experiential, semantic, practice, communication, monitoring, and internalization strategies. O'Malley (1985) classified them into: metacognitive (executive), cognitive (direct), and socio-affective (social-mediating) strategies. Rubin (1987) classified them into: learning (cognitive and metacognitive), communication, and social strategies. Oxford (1990) classified language learning strategies into Direct strategies: memory, cognitive, and compensation; and Indirect strategies: metacognitive, affective and social strategies. Stern (1992) classified them into: management and planning, cognitive (problem solving), communicative-experiential (the learner's attempt to keep the conversation going), interpersonal (the learners' attempts to evaluate their own performance and monitor their own development), and affective (the learners' feelings about language learning). And last but not least, Dörnyei (2005) classified them into four categories: cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social strategies.

It is apparent that there is no clear agreement among researchers on what language learning strategies are and how we can classify them (Oxford, 1990). This researcher believes that such a disagreement is an advantage due to the nature of language learning

instruction and the variability of learners' cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and variability of researchers and research methods. Since this study utilized Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning to identify patterns of language learning strategies, this research shall also adopt Oxford's (1990) classifications of language learning strategies.

Language Learning Strategy Training

Language learning researchers have focused their attention towards how learners process new information and what kinds of strategies they employ during language learning. As a result, strategy training gained valuable importance as being able to help language learners improve their learning and language learning strategies have been incorporated into language instruction under the name of 'strategy training', 'strategy instruction', and 'learning how to learn' (Yang, 2010). Chamot & O'Malley (1987) expressed this idea by stating that "Strategies can be taught and students who are taught to use strategies and are provided with sufficient practice in using them will learn more effectively than students who have had no experience with learning strategies." (p. 240). Language learning strategy training does not only teach language learning strategies, but also encourages learners to control their emotions and beliefs about language learning (Oxford, 1990), which leads necessarily into better learning of the language by the learners.

Researchers have identified many objectives for providing learners with strategy training: among these are tools that instruct learners to self-diagnose their strengths and weaknesses, become aware of what helps them to learn more efficiently the target language, develop problem-solving skills, experiment with many familiar and unfamiliar

strategies, take decisions on how to approach a language task, monitor and self-evaluate own learning, and transfer successful strategies to new learning situations (Cohen . 1998). It is important for teachers to train their students on using strategies for language learning and that requires teachers themselves being trained on identifying, practicing, applying and evaluating language learning strategies that are compatible with their learners' needs (Oxford, 1990).

Since the 1980s, many researchers have presented strategy training models (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; Cohen, 1998; Chamot & O'Malley, 1987; Oxford, 1990; Grenfell & Harris, 1999). All these instructional models highlight the significance of developing students' appreciation of the value of learning strategies and suggest that teachers may conduct modeling and demonstration, provide multiple practice opportunities for students to use them on their own, in addition to students' evaluation of how well a strategy has worked, choose the proper strategy for a certain task, and to be able to actively transfer strategies to new tasks (Chamot, 2004).

One of the most popular instructional models is the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA). This is an instructional model that incorporates educational trends such as standards, content-based language instruction, learning strategies, and portfolio assessment in one model. It also provides an instructional design composed of five phases that would help teachers combine language, content, and learning strategies in one lesson plan (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary & Robbins, 1999). Another is The Situation-Behavior-Impact model (SBI) (Cohen, 1998). This model assigns the teacher a variety of roles in order to help students learn to use learning strategies that matches their own learning styles. And the other is the Grenfell and Harris (1999) model. In this model

students work over a cycle of six steps before they begin a new cycle. It provides preliminary familiarization with the new strategies, then makes students select their own action plans they find proper to improve their own learning.

In summary, all three models start with identifying students' current learning strategies through activities such as self-reported questionnaires, engaging them in discussions about common tasks, and reflecting on strategy use right after completing a task. All these models emphasize the development of students' awareness about their thinking and strategic processes in order to enable them to embrace strategies that will advance their language learning proficiency.

Studies on Successful and Unsuccessful language learners

Rubin (1981) identified a number of learning behaviors of successful language learners and explained that successful learners can, for example, decide for themselves which are the most suitable methods of learning, use all opportunities to practice the language, use memorization, guess intelligently, use language knowledge, learn the forms of sentences, express themselves skillfully, use all kinds of literary forms, learn from their mistakes, organize themselves, be creative in their thinking and use the situation and environment to improve their understanding. Other researchers have been able to identify language learning strategies of less successful learners as well. Reiss (1981) clarified that unsuccessful learners seem not to be aware of, or have not yet found a specific learning style. Some added that in comparison to successful learners, less successful learners tend to use fewer strategies, have fewer strategy types in their repertoires, have less capability to handle problems when learning a new language and are not capable of applying strategies appropriate to tasks assigned (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Reiss, 1981; Stern,

1975; Vann & Abraham, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). In a recent study, Gerami & Baighlou (2011) investigated language learning strategies of successful and unsuccessful EFL students from two universities in Iran and reported that successful students used a wider and different range of learning strategies than their unsuccessful peers. The study also revealed that metacognitive strategies were the most commonly preferred strategies used by successful learners, while unsuccessful EFL students tended to use cognitive strategies more often.

Language Learning Strategy and Proficiency

Since the 1970s, research on successful language learners has provided the grounds for the study of individual differences, in addition to socio-psychological variables affecting language learning. Some of the variables that have been researched are: Proficiency (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; Wharton, 2000; Green & Oxford, 1995; Yilmaz, 2010); Learning style (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; Carson & Longhini, 2002); Gender (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Green & Oxford, 1995; Yilmaz, 2010); Motivation (Dörnyei Z. , 2003; Schmidt & Watanabe, 2001); and Cultural backgrounds (Littlewood, 2001 ; Ok, 2003; Oxford, 1990; Yilmaz, 2010), etc.

According to Farhady (1982), Language proficiency is one of the most poorly defined terms in the field of language testing. Nonetheless, despite conflicting views of its definition, many scholars appear to agree that the focus of proficiency testing is on the students' ability to use language. The term 'proficiency' may be defined as: "the degree of competence or the capability in a given language demonstrated by an individual at a given point in time independent of a specific textbook, chapter in the book, or pedagogical method" (Brière ,1972, p.332 as cited in Farhady, 1982). The American Council on the

Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) defines proficiency as one's functional language ability (ACTFL, glossary, 2012). A limited English proficient student is considered as someone who comes from a non-English background and has sufficient difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English language and that those difficulties may deny this individual the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or to participate in the social activities. (ACTFL, ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012). An English Language Learner needs to be proficient enough to take part in regular classes conducted in English without requiring substantial English language support. In addition, the proficient ELL student should be able to achieve some kind of success in those classes (Stephenson, Johnson, Jorgensen, & Young, 2003). English language proficiency tests are the most common procedures used to measure proficiency in English Language learning contexts. Those tests need to correspond to requirements of the classroom culture and to be well grounded in research field of language learning. The content of these tests should also be provided by experienced teachers who are more knowledgeable about the students and curriculum to be tested. Those tests are considered stronger assessment instruments that are much more age-appropriate and in line with the national curriculum (Stephenson, Johnson, Jorgensen, & Young, 2003).

Language learning strategies have a major role in language learning process which can influence the outcome of language learning (Griffiths, 2003). Many studies support the existence of a correlation between strategy use and language proficiency and that they both correlate with each other (Liu, 2004). Some studies provide evidence that language learning strategies are influenced by the degree of proficiency the learner has in the

foreign language, both in terms of frequency and choice of specific strategy types (Fernández Dobao, 2002; Yilmaz, 2010; Yang M. , 2010; Khalil, 2005; Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh, & Alshboul, 2010; Radwan, 2011; Sheorey, 1999), while some has found no significant relation between proficiency and strategy use (Abu Shmais, 2003; Salem, 2006). It is hard to define the relationship between proficiency and strategy use or draw a simple linear relationship between them.

Language Learning Strategy and Gender

In addition to variables like level of language proficiency, researchers of language learning strategies have been trying to find a correlation with other variables such as gender. In examining the differences in strategies used by female and male language learners, results of research yielded controversial results. Some found no difference in the overall strategy use between male and female students (Vandergrift, 1997; Abu Shmais, 2003; Yang M. . 2010; McMullen, 2009; Salem, 2006). Other studies found that male students use language learning strategies more than females do (Wharton, 2000; Radwan, 2011). Other studies concluded that female learners use strategies more than male learners (Ok, 2003; Teh, Embi, Yusoff, & Mahamod, 2009; Yilmaz, 2010; Khalil, 2005; Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh, & Alshboul, 2010; Sheorey, 1999). From an instructional viewpoint, then, we are not certain whether female or male students are furthestmost in need of language learning strategies (Chamot, 2004).

Language Learning Strategy and Culture

The context of the learning situation and the cultural values of the learner's society have a strong influence on language learning strategy use in terms of choice and acceptability (Abu Shmais, 2003; Chamot A. , 2004; Gerami & Baighlou, 2011; Sheorey,

1999). For instance, some cultures reinforce individual competition and their education system is designed around competitive tasks and assignments. In Other cultures which foster collaboration among others, we find out that their education system is organized around collaborative tasks. In both examples different language learning strategies might be adopted by successful learners in both contexts and carries with it important implications that need to be considered by teachers and curriculum designers. Teachers need to identify such cultural peculiarities in order to match instruction to learners' demands and strategy use preference (Yilmaz, 2010; Abu Shmais, 2003; Gerami & Baighlou, 2011; Sheorey, 1999).

Relevant Studies

Gerami & Baighlou (2011) investigated LLS of successful and unsuccessful EFL students from two universities in Iran and reported that in general Iranian EFL students were medium strategy users. Successful EFL students used a wider and different range of learning strategies than their unsuccessful peers. Successful EFL students often used metacognitive strategies while unsuccessful EFL students tended to use "surface level" cognitive strategies. The study also found that Iranian EFL students used affective strategies least frequently. The study also reported that due to cultural context of EFL learning in Iran, Iranian EFL students used affective strategies least frequently.

Yilmaz (2010) investigated English language learning strategies use of 140 participants of English majors enrolled at a university in Turkey. It also investigated correlations with gender, proficiency, and self-efficacy variables. With regards to overall strategy use, the study revealed that the participants were high strategy users. The study reported high to medium of use of each of the six categories. The highest rank was for

Compensation strategies while the lowest was for Affective strategies. The results indicated that female students as being more affective strategy users than males. This study also found that more proficient learners used language learning strategies more widely than less proficient learners. From the cultural perspective, the study revealed that due to their educational experience where students have restricted opportunities to use functional practice strategies especially in large classes. Turkish students seem to prefer some strategies (e.g., Compensation and partly metacognitive strategies) over other strategies.

Abu Shmais (2003) examined the frequency of English language learning strategies use of 99 male and female Arabic-speaking English-majors at a university in Palestine in relation to gender and proficiency variables. The results showed that the participants were medium strategy users in general. The highest rank was for Metacognitive strategies, which could be related to cultural and educational background differences, while the lowest was for compensation strategies. The results revealed that gender and proficiency had no significant correlation on the use of strategies.

Khalil (2005) investigated the language learning strategies use of 194 high school and 184 university English-as-a-foreign-language learners in Palestine, using Oxford's (1990) SILL and the effect of language proficiency and gender on frequency of strategy use. The findings showed that overall strategy use of both groups fell within the medium range. Metacognitive and social strategies ranked the highest, whereas memory and affective strategies ranked the lowest. The results also showed that female students reported significantly higher frequency of strategy use than male students, and that learner

proficiency level and gender had a statistically significant effect on frequency of overall strategy use.

Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh, & Alshboul (2010) used Oxford's (1990) SILL to explore learning strategies use of 111 English-major students at a university in Jordan. The mean value for students' use of the entire learning strategies was high. Metacognitive strategies ranked the highest whereas memory strategies were the least frequently used. Results also showed that the higher the proficiency level, the more frequent the strategy use is. The study also revealed that female students often used strategies more frequently than males.

Riazi (2007) investigated the patterns of English language learning strategy use of 120 female Arabic-speaking students majoring in English at a university in Qatar, using Oxford's (1990) SILL. The results showed that learners used learning strategies with high to medium frequency. The highest rank went for metacognitive strategies while the lowest was for compensation strategies. In addition, the results indicated that freshmen students reported the highest rate of strategy use. Except for compensation strategies, results did not show any significant difference among four educational levels regarding the use of strategy categories. In addition to that, the results indicated that freshmen students reported the highest rate of strategy use. Except for compensation strategies, results did not show any significant difference among four educational levels regarding the use of strategy categories.

McMullen (2009) investigated language learning strategies use of 165 male and female Saudi EFL students in three universities in Saudi Arabia. The findings showed overall strategy use of both groups fell within the medium range. The results showed gender and academic major did not have a statistically significant effect on the use of

LLS among Saudi EFL students. The results also showed that Saudi EFL students as a whole have been favoring three strategy categories (social, metacognitive, and compensation) but neglected three others (cognitive, memory, and affective). The results also showed that female students used slightly more LLSs than male students.

Radwan (2011) investigated the use of language learning strategies of 128 students majoring in English at a university in Oman and the relationship with gender and English proficiency. Results showed a medium range with regards to overall strategy use. The students used metacognitive strategies significantly more than any other category of strategies, with memory strategies ranking last on students' preference scale. There were no significant differences between males and females in the overall use of strategies. Male students used more social strategies than female students. Moreover, the relationship between strategy use and proficiency showed that proficiency had a significant effect on the overall strategies used by learners as well as on three categories, namely cognitive, metacognitive, and affective strategies, in favor of proficient students.

Sheorey (1999) investigated the language learning strategies of 1261 college students studying English in India. Results indicated that Indian college students use learning strategies with high to moderate frequency. Metacognitive strategies were used more frequently than other types of strategies. Cultural and educational backgrounds seemed to influence some of the strategies they use. Female students reported significantly more frequent use of strategies than male students. In addition, students with high proficiency reported significantly more frequent use of strategies than less proficient students. The results also suggested that Indian students seem to favor certain strategies

that would help them boost their communicative performance in English and would help them succeed in an examination driven educational system.

Salem (2006) investigated the role of motivation, gender, and language learning strategies in English as a foreign Language proficiency. The participants were 147 female and male undergraduate students enrolled in intensive English classes at a university in Lebanon. The results revealed that overall strategy use did not play a significant role in EFL proficiency. The most frequently used strategies were the cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and the least frequently used were the affective strategies. The results also showed no significant role for gender in the overall use of language learning strategies, but showed significant differences between males and females in their use of memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, in favor of females.

Yang (2010) investigated the strategy usage of 288 Korean University students using Oxford's (1990) SILL. The findings showed that Korean university students were medium strategy users. Compensation strategies were the most frequently used whereas memory strategies were the least frequently used. The study indicated that language proficiency levels had significant effects on strategy use. The study found that gender had no effect on the overall strategy use of EFL Korean university learners.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This study was designed to examine the patterns of English language learning strategies of 190 EFL university students through reporting on a self-rated survey. It also investigated the effects of proficiency and gender on strategies used by learners. In order to achieve this, the study used an Arabic translated version of Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (version 7.0) (see Appendix B), in addition to a background information questionnaire that was designed by the researcher to collect data relevant to the nature of this research (see Appendix A).

This is a survey research that utilizes a 3 x 2 factorial design. The two factors are: gender and proficiency level at UGRU. Gender has two levels (males and females) and proficiency has three levels: level one (beginning), level two (intermediate) and level three (advanced). Proficiency levels and gender are the independent variables. The dependent variables are the mean scores of the entire SILL items and the mean scores of each of the six categories measured by the SILL (memory, metacognitive, cognitive, compensation, affective, and social strategies). This design is used to examine the effects of the independent variables individually, and in interaction with each other on each of the dependent variables.

Participants

This study was conducted at the United Arab Emirates University in Al Ain, UAE. 190 students participated in the study, 131 were females and 59 were males. In general this reflects the fact that female students' numbers exceed male students' numbers at the

university. All participants were enrolled in the University's General Requirements Unit (UGRU) Communication Program between March and December in the academic year of 2012. The CEPA exam, which is the national university's entrance exam, was used as the criteria for acceptance in the program. The distribution of students on the three level of UGRU depended on their scores at the CEPA exam. Students were enrolled in UGRU's communication program in order to assist them achieve the required IELTS score of 5.0 with which they can directly proceed to their undergraduate studies.

All participants were non-native speakers of English and they began their study of English language at the elementary school level. Most of their ages ranged between 19 to 21 years old. The participants came from all the seven Emirates of the UAE. Almost half of the participants were from the Emirate of Abu Dhabi which is the largest Emirate in the country. The rest came from the other six Emirates. Ten percent of participants were from other Arab nationalities mainly from Oman and Yemen in addition to Sudan, Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Palestine.

Despite the fact that this study is exclusive to only one UAE University in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi which is considered a limitation, the UAEU is the oldest and largest University in the country and students represented in the sample come from the 7 Emirates as seen in Figure 2. The largest sample came from Abu Dhabi which is also the largest among the seven Emirates.

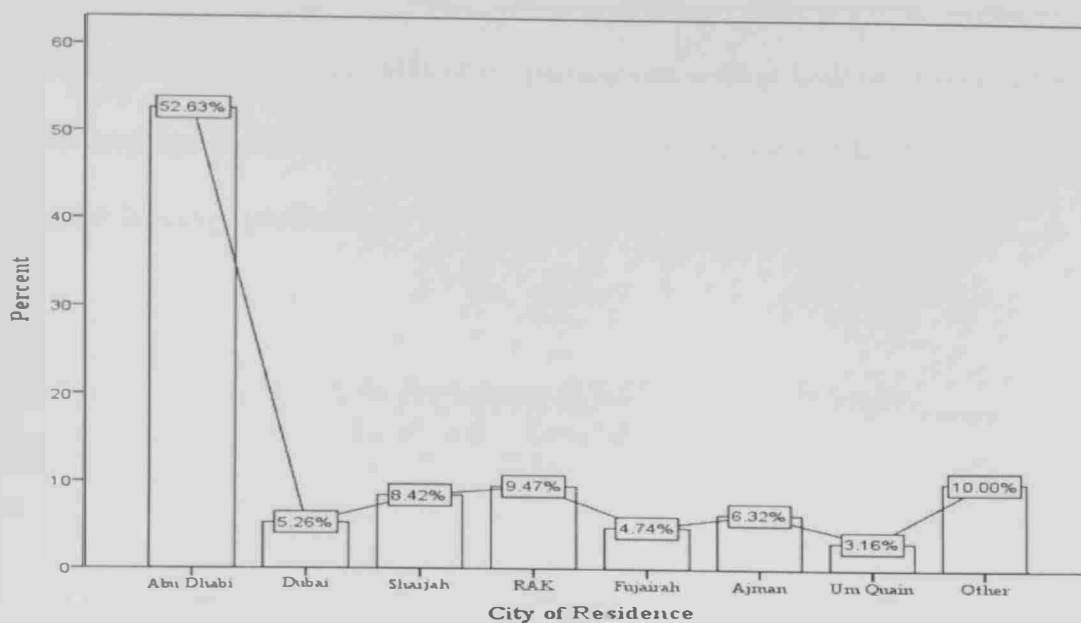


Figure 2 Distribution of students according to Residence

Table 1. shows that the percentage of female to male participants was approximately %70 to %30. Almost % 95 of participants fall between 18-21 years age group as shown in table 2.

Table 1

Distribution of participants by Gender

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	59	31.1
Female	131	68.9

Table 2

Age groups of participants

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
16 -17 years	3	1.6
18 -19 years	142	77.6
20 - 21 years	32	17.5
22 - 23 years	2	1.1
24 and above	4	2.2

Table 3 shows that 36% of the participants were at level one (beginning), of English language proficiency, 44% of the participants were at level two (intermediate) of English language proficiency, and 20% of the participants were at level three (advanced) of English language proficiency.

Table 3

Distribution of participants by Proficiency (UGRU Level) and Gender

Gender	Level one	Level two	Level three
Male	20	27	12
Female	49	56	26
Total (<i>n</i>)	69	83	38
Total (%)	36.3	43.7	20

Instrumentation

This study used an Arabic translation of Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning SILL (version 7.0) in addition to a demographic questionnaire (see Appendices A & B).

Demographic Questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire contained eleven items related to students' sex, age, place of residence, high school major, current level at UGRU, college major, and their English CEPA score. The background questionnaire was revised thoroughly by the researcher and the thesis advisor in order to reach a format that would enable gathering as much information as required without having to take much of the respondents' time. It took participants approximately three minutes to answer the demographic questions.

The SILL

The main instrument used in this research was an Arabic translation of Oxford's (1990) ESL/EFL version Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).

The SILL is a five point Likert-scale paper-and-pencil inventory. It consists of fifty multiple choice questions/statements that can be answered according to the following scale: 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. Based on a theory that views the learners as a whole person who possesses intellectual, social emotional and physical resources in addition to the cognitive/metacognitive information processing dimension, Oxford (1986) developed a six-set strategy system of second language learning behaviors where she was able to identify hundreds of strategies each fitting under these six groups: affective, social, metacognitive, memory-related, general cognitive, and compensatory (Oxford, 2002).

The SILL first appeared as an instrument for assessing the language learning strategies frequency used by students at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. There were two versions of the SILL, one for native speakers of English learning a foreign language (80 items) and another (50 items) version for learners of English as a second or foreign language. Both were published in an appendix to Oxford's (1990b) book. The taxonomy of strategies consisted of 50 statements about strategies used by language learners covering six broad categories of strategies, each represented by a number of items. In addition, Oxford (1990) developed a scale, which reflects the level of strategy usage: (1) High (3.5-5.0), (2) Medium (2.5-3.4), and (3) Low (1.0-2.4).

The SILL appears to be one of the most widespread summative rating scales most often used around the world to assess the use of language learning strategies (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) also noted that due to intensity of use in research, the SILL seems to be extensively checked for reliability and validity and in

many several ways. The items in SILL are easily responded to and is an efficient measurement of varied strategy used by learners. It can also measure the relationship between strategy use and other variables (Yang, 2010).

Oxford's (1990) SILL has been employed in several research projects. Numerous studies using the SILL have been conducted in the Middle East (Khalil, 2005; Riazi, 2007; Radwan, 2011; Yilmaz, 2010; Abu Shmais, 2003), however, none were found to be conducted in the UAE. Concurrent and predictive validity of the SILL has also been investigated by showing the significant relationship between the SILL and language performance tests (Yang, 2010). Concurrent validity applies to validation studies when the two measures are administered at roughly around the same time. The resulting correlation would be a concurrent validity coefficient. This is in contrast to predictive validity, where one measure occurs earlier and is meant to predict some later measure (Concurrent validity, 2011).

In this research an Arabic translation of the SILL was used in order to allow the participants to respond accurately and to avoid any incorrect responses that might occur due to language barriers. Basically there are two options for translating a text; direct or literal, and oblique translation under which lies several translation techniques (Molina & Albir, 2002). Since the direct translation was not possible due to the different natures of both English and Arabic, an oblique translation technique was used instead of the direct one. Keeping this in mind, the SILL translation process went through a committee approach (Douglas & Craig, 2007) of translation that comprised of the following stages:

First, the researcher – who is also a professional translator - along with three other experienced translators and an Arabic Editor, formed a committee and created the first

version of the translated SILL. In order to get a clear understanding of the English statements and what they really meant, the researcher sought help of native English speaking professionals who explained some problematic terms and phrases from a native speaker's perspective. Second, the researcher revised the translation with the thesis advisor who is a professor in the faculty of education at the UAEU. Third, and upon recommendation of the advisor, the translation and the format was shown to another two professors in the faculty of Education, who in their turn provided valuable remarks that were considered when producing the final version of the SILL.

Cronbach's alpha is a measurement of a reliability coefficient which is generally used as a measure of internal consistency or reliability of a psychometric test score for a sample of examinees. SILL's reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, and it is reported to have a Cronbach's alpha of between: .90 to .93, which is considered a valid and significant correlate of language proficiency and achievement (Oxford, 1990; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995). When it comes to the validity of SILL in ESL/EFL contexts, SILL's reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha in numerous studies all over the world across many cultural groups, and it is reported to have a Cronbach's alpha of between: .90 to .94 which is a valid, significant correlate of language proficiency and achievement (Oxford, 1990; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Wharton, 2000; Yang, 2010; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995).

In the Middle East, Abu Shmais (2003) reported Cronbach's alpha .83 using an Arabic translation of the SILL with a sample of 99 Palestinian University EFL learners. Khalil (2005) reported a Cronbach's alpha .86 using an Arabic translation of the SILL with a sample of 194 high school and 184 university English EFL learners in Palestine. In

a study of 111 university students in Jordan (Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh, & Alshboul, 2010) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .81. Riazi (2007) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .84 in a study that investigated the patterns of language learning strategy use among 120 female university students at a university in Qatar. Finally, Yilmaz (2010) reported an alpha reliability coefficient of .84 in a study of 140 EFL university students in Turkey. None of the above mentioned studies fall in the range reported by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) and Oxford (1996) high indexes of Cronbach's alpha reliability (.91 to .93). There is a need for more research to investigate the reasons for this discrepancy.

To test the reliability of the Arabic translation of the SILL that was used to conduct this study, the researcher measured Cronbach's alpha coefficients with 50 items and it was found to be .95. This result is consistent with most studies conducted around the world, but shows a higher level of reliability than in other Arabic versions of the SILL used in previous studies such as Khalil (2005), Radwan (2011), Shmais (2003), Riazi (2007) and Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh, & Alshboul (2010). This result suggested that the scale scores had a high consistency in responses among 50 items in this research, a result consistent with the range reported by many studies all over the world. Furthermore, the split-half coefficient was measured by computing scores for two halves of the scale. The split-half coefficients showed high consistency between the two halves .89. The purpose for the scale being split into two halves is to see how equivalent are the two halves of the SILL as shown in Table 4.

Reliability statistics was also computed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients with each of the six strategy categories and the reliability score for each one of them was acceptable as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Reliability Statistics of the Arabic Version of the SILL

Reliability Measure	Cronbach's Alpha	Guttman Split-Half Coefficient
Overall	.95	.89
Memory strategies	.77	
Cognitive strategies	.86	
Compensation strategies	.73	
Metacognitive strategies	.86	
Affective strategies	.76	
Social strategies	.83	

Data Collection

After acquiring the required permissions from the UAEU's Scientific Research and Ethics Committee to conduct this research study, the researcher contacted the University's General Requirements Unit. It was nearly the end of spring term of 2012 and the students' attendance was not very encouraging to proceed with distribution of survey in classes at the male campus in particular. Upon recommendation of one of the administrative staff at UGRU, a number of surveys were placed at the English Language Center (ELC) at UGRU's male campus. Many students would come to study for their exams and were asked to complete the survey. This yielded almost 50 surveys from male students. Another approach to collect the Data was conducted at the female side where the researcher contacted head of UGRU at the female campus, who in his turn assisted in distributing the survey to instructors who had classes at that day. Almost 10 instructors volunteered to administer the survey to their students. The results yielded a number of surveys which were returned completed.

Another approach to collect data by the researcher was by recruiting two students from the male campus and two from the female campus to assist in distributing survey to students at their dorms and collect them back. The assistant students were briefed on the

nature of the survey and were given clear instruction on how to administer the survey. They were given one week to do so. The number of surveys collected was 150 from the male campus, and 100 from the female campus. Unfortunately all the survey collected from the male campus had to be excluded for suspicion of manipulation by the student recruited to assist.

In order to increase the number of surveys collected from male students, the researcher waited for the beginning of the summer term at UGRU to distribute another batch of surveys with the help of the classroom instructors. Classroom instructors were contacted by the researcher who gave them detailed information about the survey and asked for their permission to administer the survey to all their students. Teachers gave participants the survey pack, that contained a covering letter, an informed consent letter, a demographic questionnaire, the Arabic translation of the SILL. Classroom instructors gave the participants directions on how to complete the survey. The consent form confirmed that participation in the survey is voluntary and would have no impact on their grades.

The confidentiality of the survey responses was explained to all students who were also informed that their classroom instructors shall not have access to their survey responses. All surveys would be kept in a locked cupboard at the researcher's office. After the data analysis, the surveys would be kept in a safe place for three years that would be accessible to the researcher only. Classroom instructors explained to the participants how to respond to the survey. In the demographic questionnaire, participants were requested to select answers to the questions. As for the SILL, participants were informed that they had to mark the response that would apply to their situation. The participant spent

approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey. The classroom instructors collected the surveys and brought them back to their offices after which they were handed to the researcher. Out of a total of 350 copies which were distributed to the participants, only 190 were valid. 150 were excluded for suspicion of tampering, and 10 copies were removed since participants chose more than two responses or the same responses on the survey questions.

Analysis Procedures

Preliminary analyses revealed that the data were normally distributed. Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, ranges and standard deviations) were used, in order to process demographic data analyses and analyze the overall strategy patterns of UGRU students, the most and least strategy items used by students and the overall strategy pattern in each of the six categories.

Data analyses for the SILL were performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) version 20.0 for windows. The interpretation of the mean scores of the SILL in this research, follows Oxford & Burry-Stock (1995) scales of low; for the range between 1.0 to 2.4, medium; for the range between 2.5 to 3.4, and high; for the range between 3.5 to 5.0.

ANOVA analysis was conducted at $p < .05$ significance to determine if there were any significant variations among the three levels of proficiency.

T-test analysis was performed to determine if there were significant differences in overall learning strategy use concerning the gender variable.

This is a survey research with 3 x 2 factorial design; proficiency levels and gender are the independent variables, while the mean scores of the entire SILL items, and the

mean scores of each of the six categories measured by the SILL resembled the dependent variables.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was: 1) to investigate the patterns of English language learning strategies used by students at the University General Requirements Unit (UGRU), and 2) to examine if there were any significant differences in the use of English language learning strategies by gender and proficiency level of students.

This study aimed to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the general patterns of English language learning strategies used by UAEU students at UGRU?
2. Are there any significant differences in the use of English language learning strategies regarding language proficiency between level one (beginning), level two (intermediate) and level three (advanced) UGRU students?
3. Are there any significant differences in the use of English language learning strategies between male and female students?

The general pattern of English language learning strategies used by UAEU students at UGRU.

Descriptive statistics were performed in order to answer the first research question: what are the general patterns of English language learning strategies used by UAEU students at UGRU? The general patterns included identifying the participants' overall English language learning strategy use in addition to the most and least frequently used strategies. In order to do so, this research adopted Oxford's (1990) scale (high frequency use (3.5-5.0), medium frequency use (2.5-3.49), and low frequency use (1.0-2.49)).

In Table 5 shows that the overall mean and standard deviation ($M= 3.02$, $SD = .63$) indicates an overall medium range of strategy use among participants. The distribution was normal (skewness = .22, kurtosis = -.44), thus the parametric analysis was possible to conduct in this study.

This medium range of use was also reflected when examining the six strategy categories individually as shown in Table 5, where each of the six categories fall within the medium range criteria. Metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used among the six strategies followed by social strategies, compensation strategies, affective strategies, cognitive strategies and memory strategies, respectively.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of the SILL Categories

Strategy Category	*Mem	Cog	Comp	Meta	Soc	Aff	Overall
Valid n	190	190	190	190	190	190	190
Mean	2.69	2.91	3.15	3.32	3.24	2.96	3.02
Median	2.67	2.79	3.17	3.44	3.17	2.83	2.98
Mode	2.67	2.36	3.50	3.56	3.00 _a	2.50	2.32 _a
Std. Deviation	.69	.73	.74	.79	.90	.82	.63
Variance	.475	.528	.542	.623	.809	.679	.400
Skewness	.403	.489	.010	-.119	-.048	.138	.215
Kurtosis	-.377	-.349	-.396	-.590	-.658	-.389	-.443
Range	3.00	3.50	3.50	3.56	4.00	3.83	3.10

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

* Mem = Memory strategy; Cog = Cognitive strategy; Comp = Compensation strategy; Meta = Metacognitive strategy; Aff = Affective strategy; Soc = Social strategy.

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics for each of the 50 strategies of the SILL. It indicated four strategies as a high use strategies; three of which were metacognitive and one compensatory strategies. The least frequently used strategies were six strategies; three

of which were memory, one affective and two cognitive strategies. The strategy with the highest mean was compensatory strategy number 29, "*If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same.*". The strategy with the lowest mean was memory strategy number 6, "*I use flash cards to remember new English words.*" Most of the remaining strategies were at the medium range.

Table 6

Ranking of the Fifty Strategies of the SILL According to Use

Mean	SD	*Use	Type	No	Strategy
3.72	1.03	H	Comp	29	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same
3.68	1.07	H	Meta	31	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.
3.61	1.25	H	Meta	32	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
3.55	1.16	H	Meta	38	I think about my progress in learning English.
3.48	1.09	M	Meta	30	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.
3.47	1.20	M	Meta	33	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.
3.44	1.10	M	Aff	39	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.
3.42	1.18	M	Aff	40	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.
3.41	1.26	M	Comp	26	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.
3.39	1.18	M	Soc	46	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.
3.37	1.20	M	Soc	48	I ask for help from English speakers.
3.37	1.21	M	Soc	45	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again.
3.35	1.21	M	Cog	11	I try to talk like native English speakers.
3.33	1.15	M	Meta	37	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.
3.28	1.33	M	Soc	50	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.
3.28	1.15	M	Cog	10	I say or write new English words several times.

Table 6 (continued)

Mean	SD	Use	Type	No	Strategy
3.27	1.25	M	Comp	25	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.
3.24	1.32	M	Cog	15	I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English.
3.23	1.17	M	Meta	35	I look for people I can talk to in English.
3.22	1.17	M	Cog	13	I use the English words I know in different ways.
3.19	1.18	M	Cog	19	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.
3.17	1.21	M	Cog	12	I practice the sounds of English.
3.11	1.07	M	Comp	24	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.
3.08	1.13	M	Mem	2	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.
3.08	1.15	M	Soc	49	I ask questions in English.
3.07	1.17	M	Aff	42	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.
3.02	1.13	M	Mem	1	I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.
3.01	1.26	M	Cog	21	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.
2.98	1.24	M	Soc	47	I practice English with other students.
2.96	1.26	M	Cog	14	I start conversations in English.
2.95	1.14	M	Mem	9	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.
2.94	1.11	M	Mem	4	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.
2.81	1.05	M	Comp	28	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.
2.78	1.18	M	Meta	36	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.
2.78	1.24	M	Aff	41	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.
2.77	1.26	M	Aff	44	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.
2.75	1.27	M	Cog	20	I try to find patterns in English.

Table 6 (continued)

Mean	SD	Use	Type	No	Strategy
2.74	1.13	M	Meta	34	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.
2.71	1.12	M	Mem	3	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.
2.68	1.19	M	Cog	18	I first skim an English passage (read it quickly) then go back and read carefully.
2.65	1.05	M	Cog	22	I try not to translate word-for-word.
2.62	1.14	M	Mem	8	I review English lessons often.
2.59	1.08	M	Comp	27	I read English without looking up every new word.
2.54	1.23	M	Cog	23	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.
2.47	1.23	L	Cog	17	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.
2.34	1.20	L	Mem	7	I physically act out new English words.
2.31	1.31	L	Mem	5	I use rhymes to remember new English words.
2.27	1.26	L	Aff	43	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.
2.25	1.17	L	Cog	16	I read for pleasure in English.
2.24	1.14	L	Mem	6	I use flash cards to remember new English words.

* H = High; M = Medium; L = Low

Descriptive statistics were performed on each of the six categories in order to identify the most and least frequently used strategies for each category as shown in Tables 8 to 12.

In the Memory Strategies category (items 1-9), these are strategies that help learners remember, store and retrieve new information. The means and standard deviations showed medium use of strategies with the exception of three strategies which indicated low strategy use. The most frequently used strategy at this category was, "I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember the." ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.13$), and the least

frequently used strategy was, “*I use flashcards to remember new English words.*” ($M = 2.24, SD = 1.14$).

Table 7

Memory Strategies: Means, and Standard Deviations

Use	Strategies 1 - 9	M	SD	Rank
M	I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	3.02	1.13	2
M	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them	3.08	1.13	1
M	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.	2.71	1.12	6
M	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used	2.94	1.11	4
L	I use rhymes to remember new English words.	2.31	1.31	8
L	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	2.24	1.14	9
L	I physically act out new English words.	2.34	1.20	7
M	I review English lessons often.	2.83	3.21	5
M	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	2.95	1.14	3

In the Cognitive Strategies category (items 10-23), these are strategies that help learners understand and produce new language through practicing, summarizing, reasoning, deducting, and analyzing. The means and standard deviations showed medium use of strategies except for one strategy. The most frequently used strategy at this category was, “*I try to talk like native English speakers.*” ($M = 3.35, SD = 1.20$), and the least frequently used strategy was, “*I read for pleasure in English.*” ($M = 2.25, SD = 1.17$).

Table 8

Cognitive Strategies: Means, and Standard Deviations

Use Strategies 10-23	M	SD	Rank
M I say or write new English words several times.	3.28	1.15	2
M I try to talk like native English speakers.	3.35	1.21	1
M I practice the sounds of English.	3.17	1.21	6
M I use the English words I know in different ways.	3.22	1.17	4
M I start conversations in English.	2.96	1.26	8
M I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English.	3.24	1.32	3
L I read for pleasure in English.	2.25	1.17	14
M I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	2.47	1.23	13
M I first skim an English passage (read it quickly) then go back and read carefully.	2.68	1.19	10
M I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	3.19	1.18	5
M I try to find patterns in English.	2.75	1.27	9
M I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	3.01	1.26	7
M I try not to translate word-for-word.	2.65	1.05	11
M I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	2.54	1.23	12

In the Compensatory Strategies (items 24-29), these are strategies that enable learners to use the language to overcome any limitations or gaps in their linguistic knowledge. The means and standard deviations showed medium use of strategies with the exception of one strategy which indicated a high use. The most frequently used strategy at this category was, *"If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same."* ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.03$), and the least frequently used strategy was, *"I read English without looking up every new word."* ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.08$).

Table 9

Compensation Strategies: Means, and Standard Deviation

Use Strategies 24-29	M	SD	Rank
M To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	3.11	1.07	4
M When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	3.27	1.25	3
M I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	3.41	1.26	2
M I read English without looking up every new word.	2.59	1.08	6
M I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	2.81	1.05	5
H If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same	3.72	1.03	1

In the Metacognitive Strategies category (items 30-38), these are strategies that help learners control their own cognition and enable them maximize learning. The means and standard deviations ranged from high to medium. The most frequently used strategy at this category was, "*I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.*" ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.07$), and the least frequently used strategy was, "*I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.*" ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.13$).

Table 10

Metacognitive Strategies: Means, and Standard Deviations

Use Strategies 30-38	M	SD	Rank
H I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	3.48	1.09	4
H I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	3.68	1.07	1
H I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	3.61	1.25	2
H I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	3.47	1.20	5
M I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	2.74	1.13	9
M I look for people I can talk to in English.	3.23	1.17	7
M I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	2.78	1.18	8

Table 10 (continued)

Use	Strategies 30-38	M	SD	Rank
M	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	3.33	1.15	6
H	I think about my progress in learning English.	3.55	1.16	3

In the Affective Strategies category (items 39-44), these are strategies that help learners lower their anxiety levels, increase motivation, and control their emotions. The means and standard deviations showed medium use with the exception of one which indicated low strategy use. The most frequently used strategy at this category was, “*I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.*” ($M = 3.44, SD = 1.10$), and the least frequently used strategy was, “*I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.*” ($M = 2.27, SD = 1.26$).

Table 11

Affective Strategies: Means, and Standard Deviations

Use	Strategies 39-44	M	SD	Rank
M	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	3.44	1.10	1
M	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	3.42	1.18	2
M	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	2.78	1.24	4
M	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	3.07	1.17	3
L	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	2.27	1.26	6
M	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	2.77	1.26	5

In the Social Strategies category (items 45-50), these are strategies that help learners to interact, communicate, cooperate, and empathize with others to maximize learning. The means and standard deviations showed medium use of strategies. The most frequently used strategy at this category was, “*I ask English speakers to correct me when I*

talk." ($M = 3.39, SD = 1.18$). The least frequently used strategy was, "I practice English with other students." ($M = 2.98, SD = 1.24$).

Table 12

Social Strategies: Means, and Standard Deviations

Use	Strategies 45-50	M	SD	Rank
M	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again.	3.37	1.21	3
M	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	3.39	1.18	1
M	I practice English with other students.	2.98	1.24	6
M	I ask for help from English speakers.	3.37	1.20	2
M	I ask questions in English.	3.08	1.15	5
M	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3.28	1.33	4

The significant differences in the use of English learning strategies by proficiency level.

To provide answers to the second question, this research examined if there were any significant differences in the use of English language learning strategies regarding language proficiency between level one (beginning), level two (intermediate) and level three (advanced) UGRU students?

Descriptive statistics were conducted to show the overall mean difference between learners' proficiency levels. The results as indicated a medium overall mean for all three levels, level one ($M = 3.05, SD = .60$), level two ($M = 3.02, SD = .67$) and level three ($M = 2.94, SD = .64$). However and despite the difference between the mean scores of three groups was very small, the variance was slightly higher in favor of level two students.

Table 13

Descriptive Statistics for Overall Strategy Use by Proficiency Level

Proficiency Level	n	Mean	SD	R
level one	69	3.05	.59	2.56
level two	83	3.03	.67	3.10
level three	38	2.94	.64	2.28

Descriptive statistics were also conducted to show the mean difference in proficiency levels according to each of the strategy categories. Table 14 indicated that level three students (Advanced) favored to use metacognitive strategies most ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.30$) and memory strategies least ($M = 2.51$, $SD = .77$). Level two students (intermediate) preferred to use metacognitive strategies most ($M = 3.27$, $SD = .81$) and memory strategies least ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .83$). Level one students (beginner) preferred to use metacognitive strategies most ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .80$) and memory strategies least ($M = 2.73$, $SD = .66$).

Table 14

Mean Differences According to Proficiency Levels and Strategy Categories

UGRU Level		Mem	Cog	Comp	Meta	Soc	Aff
Level one	M	2.73	2.88	3.22	3.39	3.28	3.04
	SD	0.66	0.68	0.75	0.75	0.86	0.83
Level two	M	2.73	2.94	3.15	3.27	3.26	2.94
	SD	0.67	0.73	0.74	0.81	0.92	0.88
Level three	M	2.51	2.89	3.03	3.31	3.15	2.87
	SD	0.77	0.81	0.71	0.82	0.94	0.69
Total	M	2.69	2.91	3.15	3.32	3.24	2.96
	SD	0.69	0.73	0.74	0.79	0.90	0.82

Table 15 showed the ranking of strategies used by all learners according to proficiency level one. Ten strategies were most frequently used; two compensatory, five metacognitive, two social, and one affective strategy. Seven strategies were the least frequently used; three of which are memory strategies, one affective, and three cognitive strategy. The most frequently used strategy at this level was, *"I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better."* ($M = 3.80, SD = 0.97$). The least frequently used strategy was, *"I write down my feelings in a language learning diary."* ($M = 2.20, SD = 1.33$).

Table 15

Ranking of Strategies by Proficiency Level One Students

Mean	SD	Use	Type	No	Strategy
3.8	0.97	H	Meta	31	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.
3.7	1.08	H	Meta	32	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
3.7	1.04	H	Comp	29	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same
3.7	1.03	H	Meta	33	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.
3.7	1.07	H	Soc	45	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again.
3.6	0.98	H	Meta	30	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.
3.5	1.12	H	Aff	39	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.
3.5	1.20	H	Comp	26	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.
3.5	1.26	H	Meta	38	I think about my progress in learning English.
3.5	1.15	H	Soc	48	I ask for help from English speakers.
2.4	1.06	L	Cog	22	I try not to translate word-for-word.
2.4	1.31	L	Mem	5	I use rhymes to remember new English words.
2.4	1.18	L	Mem	6	I use flash cards to remember new English words.
2.3	1.16	L	Cog	17	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.
2.3	1.09	L	Mem	7	I physically act out new English words.
2.2	1.10	L	Cog	16	I read for pleasure in English.
2.2	1.33	L	Aff	43	I write down my feelings in a learning diary.

Table 16 showed the ranking of strategies used by all learners according to proficiency level two. Four strategies were most frequently used; one compensatory, two metacognitive and one social strategy. Five strategies were the least frequently used; three of which are memory strategies, one affective, and one cognitive strategy. The most frequently used strategy at this level was, *“If I can’t think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same.”* ($M = 3.70, SD = 1.05$). The least frequently used strategy was, *“I read for pleasure in English.”* ($M = 2.20, SD = 1.21$).

Table 16

Ranking of Strategies by Proficiency Level Two Students

Mean	SD	Use	Type	No	Strategy
3.7	1.05	H	Comp	29	If I can’t think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same.
3.6	1.11	H	Meta	31	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.
3.5	1.30	H	Meta	32	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
3.5	1.10	H	Soc	46	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.
2.5	1.24	M	Cog	17	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.
2.4	1.27	L	Mem	7	I physically act out new English words.
2.3	1.20	L	Aff	43	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.
2.3	1.14	L	Mem	6	I use flash cards to remember new English words.
2.2	1.32	L	Mem	5	I use rhymes to remember new English words.
2.2	1.21	L	Cog	16	I read for pleasure in English.

Table 17 shows the ranking of strategies used by all learners according to proficiency level three. Six strategies were most frequently used; one compensatory, three metacognitive, one affective strategy and one cognitive strategy. Seven strategies were the least frequently used; four of which were memory strategies, one cognitive and one affective strategy. The most frequently used strategy at this level was, *“I think about my*

progress in English.” ($M = 3.90, SD = 0.78$). The least frequently used strategy was, “I use flash cards to remember new English words.” ($M = 2.20, SD = 1.21$).

Table 17

Ranking of Strategies by Proficiency Level Three Students

Mean	SD	Use	Type	No	Strategy
3.9	0.78	H	Meta	38	I think about my progress in learning English.
3.8	0.99	H	Comp	29	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same
3.6	1.20	H	Cog	15	I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English.
3.5	1.13	H	Meta	31	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.
3.5	1.45	H	Meta	32	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
3.5	1.08	H	Aff	40	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.
2.4	1.13	L	Mem	8	I review English lessons often.
2.4	1.26	L	Aff	43	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.
2.4	1.30	L	Mem	5	I use rhymes to remember new English words.
2.3	1.02	L	Comp	27	I read English without looking up every new word.
2.3	1.42	L	Cog	23	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.
2.3	1.25	L	Mem	7	I physically act out new English words.
1.9	1.05	L	Mem	6	I use flash cards to remember new English words.

One-way ANOVA statistics were computed to examine whether proficiency levels had a significant effect on the overall strategy use and on each of the six strategy categories. As indicated in table 18, the ANOVA summary indicated that proficiency level had no significant effect on overall strategy use, [$F(2, 187) = .404, p = 0.67$], nor did it have any significant effect on each of the six categories: memory strategies [$F(2, 187) = 1.68, p = 0.19$], cognitive strategies [$F(2, 187) = 0.15, p = 0.87$], compensatory strategies [$F(2, 187) = 0.85, p = 0.43$], metacognitive strategies [$F(2, 187) = 0.44, p = 0.65$], affective strategies [$F(2, 187) = 0.58, p = 0.56$], and social strategies [$F(2, 187) = 0.26, p = 0.77$].

Table 18

ANOVA Summary of the Six Categories of Strategies by Proficiency levels

Strategy Category	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Memory	1.581	2	.791	1.675	.190
Cognitive	.155	2	.077	.145	.865
Compensatory	.926	2	.463	.853	.428
Metacognitive	.549	2	.275	.438	.646
Social	.416	2	.208	.255	.775
Affective	.794	2	.397	.582	.560
Overall	.312	2	.156	.404	.668

The significant difference in the use of English learning strategies between male and female students.

Table 19 showed the means and standard deviations for male ($M = 3.06$, $SD = .55$) and female learners ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .67$). It indicated a medium range of strategy use by both groups. The differences between the mean scores of male and female students with regards to each strategy category were very small.

Table 19

Group Statistics of Language Learning Strategies According to Gender

	Gender	n	Mean	SD
Memory	male	59	2.78	0.63
	female	131	2.65	0.71
Cognitive	male	59	2.98	0.64
	female	131	2.88	0.76
Compensatory	male	59	3.18	0.67
	female	131	3.14	0.77
Metacognitive	male	59	3.34	0.71
	female	131	3.31	0.83
Affective	male	59	2.94	0.71
	female	131	2.97	0.87
Social	male	59	3.25	0.92
	female	131	3.24	0.90

Descriptive statistics were used to find out the most and least preferred strategy category according to gender. As seen in Table 20, both male and female learners preferred to use metacognitive strategies the most and memory strategies the least.

Table 20

Means and SDs of Six Categories of Strategies According to Gender

	Male (n=59)			Female (n=131)		
	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
Memory	2.78	.63	6	2.64	.71	6
Cognitive	2.98	.64	4	2.88	.76	5
Compensation	3.18	.67	3	3.14	.77	3
Metacognitive	3.34	.71	1	3.31	.83	1
Affective	2.94	.71	5	2.97	.87	4
Social	3.25	.92	2	3.24	.90	2
Total	3.06	.54		3.00	.67	

Descriptive statistics were used to compute the highest and least frequently language learning strategy used by male students and female students each . Table 21 showed the ranking of strategy used by male learners. Nine strategies were most frequently used; one compensatory, five metacognitive, one affective strategy and two cognitive strategy. Five strategies were the least frequently used; two of which were memory strategies, one affective, and two cognitive strategies. The most frequently used strategy used by male learners was, “*If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same.*” ($M = 3.80, SD = 0.98$). The least frequently used strategy was, “*I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.*” ($M = 2.08, SD = 1.25$).

Table 21

Ranking of the Most and Least Frequently Used Strategies by Male Learners

Mean	SD	Use	Type	No.	Strategy
3.80	0.98	H	Comp	29	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same
3.75	1.04	H	Meta	31	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.
3.61	1.05	H	Meta	38	I think about my progress in learning English.
3.59	1.23	H	Meta	32	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
3.58	1.19	H	Cog	11	I try to talk like native English speakers.
3.51	1.33	H	Cog	15	I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English.
3.51	1.18	H	Meta	30	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.
3.47	1.21	H	Meta	33	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.
3.46	1.02	H	Aff	40	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.
2.42	1.29	L	Mem	7	I physically act out new English words.
2.37	1.22	L	Cog	23	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.
2.37	1.26	L	Cog	17	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.
2.24	1.33	L	Mem	5	I use rhymes to remember new English words.
2.08	1.25	L	Aff	43	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.

Table 22 showed the ranking of strategy used by female learners. Seven strategies were most frequently used; one compensatory, five metacognitive, and one compensatory strategy. Five strategies were the least frequently used: three of which were memory strategies, one affective, and two cognitive strategies. The most frequently used strategy used by male learners was, *“If I can’t think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same.”* ($M = 3.69, SD = 1.05$). The least frequently used strategy was, *“I read for pleasure in English.”* ($M = 2.11, SD = 1.15$).

Table 22

Ranking of the Most and Least Frequently Used Strategies by Female Learners

Mean	SD	Use	Type	No.	Strategy
3.69	1.05	H	Comp	29	If I can’t think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same
3.65	1.08	H	Meta	31	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.
3.61	1.27	H	Meta	32	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
3.52	1.20	H	Meta	38	I think about my progress in learning English.
3.51	1.18	H	Comp	26	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.
3.47	1.05	H	Meta	30	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.
3.47	1.20	H	Meta	33	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.
2.36	1.25	L	Aff	43	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.
2.34	1.30	L	Mem	5	I use rhymes to remember new English words.
2.30	1.15	L	Mem	7	I physically act out new English words.
2.14	1.13	L	Mem	6	I use flash cards to remember new English words.
2.11	1.15	L	Cog	16	I read for pleasure in English.

Both male and female student reported high range frequency of similar strategies except in that male students reported additional two cognitive strategies, *“I try to talk like native English speakers, and I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken*

in English.”, and one affective strategy, “I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.” Female students used one compensatory strategy; that was not reported by male learners, “I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.”

T-test was used to examine the differences in the use of English learning strategies between male and female learners. Table 24 indicated that there was no significant difference between male and female learners concerning the overall strategy use, $t(135) = .65, p = .52$. Male students overall strategy use ($M = 3.06, SD = .55$) and females ($M = 3.00, SD = .67$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means between male and female learners of strategy use was moderate, ranging from $-.12$ to $.24$.

Table 23

Independent Samples t-Tests of Overall Strategy Use by Gender

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Overall Strategy Use	.647	135.27	.519

As indicated in table 25 there were no significant differences between male and female students in the six strategy categories. Memory strategies, $t(125) = 1.26, p = .21$; cognitive strategies, $t(131) = .96, p = .34$; compensation strategies, $t(128) = .13, p = .76$; metacognitive strategies, $t(129) = .28, p = .78$; affective strategies, $t(136) = -.30, p = .77$, and social strategies, $t(110) = .10, p = .92$.

Table 24

Independent Samples t-Tests of Six Strategy Category Use According to Gender

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Memory	1.26	125	.21
Cognitive	.96	131	.34
Compensatory	.31	128	.76
Metacognitive	.28	129	.78
Affective	-.30	136	.77
Social	.10	110	.92

Finally Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the six categories of language learning strategies as indicated in table 26. An examination of a scatter plot revealed outliers that were removed prior to computing the correlation coefficient. Overall, there was a significant positive correlation between the variables. The strongest relationship was between social and metacognitive strategies. $r = .717$, $n = 157$, $p = .000$. The weakest relationship was between compensatory and affective strategies. $r = .43$, $n = 157$, $p = .000$.

Table 25

Pearson Correlation among Six Categories of Language Learning Strategies

	Mem	Cog	Comp	Meta	Soc	Aff
Memory	1					
Cognitive	.682	1				
Compensation	.475	.615	1			
Metacognitive	.526	.644	.586	1		
Social	.524	.669	.502	.717	1	
Affective	.499	.499	.430	.586	.538	1

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

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The general patterns of English language learning strategies used by UAEU students at UGRU.

This research found that UAEU EFL learners at the University General Requirements Unit were medium strategy users with regards to the overall strategy use. These results were consistent with results of some previous research conducted among Arab EFL learners. Abu Shmais (2003) examined the frequency of English language learning strategies use Arabic-speaking English-major students at a university in Palestine. The results showed that the participants were medium strategy users in general. McMullen (2009) investigated language learning strategies use of Saudi EFL students in three universities in Saudi Arabia. The findings showed overall strategy use of both groups fell within the medium range. These results were also consistent with results of research conducted in some Asian countries. Yang (2010) investigated the strategy usage of Korean University students using Oxford's (1990) SILL. The findings showed that Korean university students were medium strategy users. However these results were inconsistent with results of some other research studies which reported high range of overall use of language learning strategies. Yilmaz (2010) investigated English language learning strategies use of English major students enrolled at a university in Turkey. The study revealed that the participants were overall high strategy users.

To understand the medium strategy use of UAEU EFL learners in the current research, the following reason may be considered. A medium range use according to Oxford (1991) means that the strategies are sometimes used, occasionally, once in a while.

and now and then. This does not reflect a consistent use of language learning strategies which would enable learners become successful strategy users or better language learners.

This medium range of English Language Learning strategy use was reported when examining the six strategy categories with a mean that ranged between 2.71- 3.36.

Metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used followed by social strategies, compensation strategies, affective strategies, cognitive strategies, and memory strategies; which were the least frequently used among the six categories. In a recent study, Gerami & Baighlou (2011) investigated language learning strategies of successful and unsuccessful EFL students from two universities in Iran and revealed that metacognitive strategies were the most commonly preferred strategies used by successful learners, while unsuccessful EFL students tended to use cognitive strategies more often. Riazi (2007) investigated the patterns of English language learning strategy use of Arabic-speaking students majoring in English at a university in Qatar, using Oxford's (1990) SILL. The results showed that the most highly used strategies reported by these students were metacognitive strategies.

It can be concluded that EFL learners at the UAE University are apt to use metacognitive strategies most. These strategies help learners understand and produce new language through practicing, summarizing, reasoning deductively, and analyzing (Oxford, 1990). Metacognitive strategies also play a major role in the learner making decisions and goal setting of their language learning, choosing learning tasks, finding task-related learning resources, making decisions about which strategies are suitable for the tasks, and assessing their language learning process; i.e., planning, monitoring, and evaluating, while continuing to be engaged heavily in grammar, vocabulary, or reading. Emirati students

seem to be placing great emphasis on controlling their own language learning process and progress. These strategies are used to encourage learners to overcome the new experience of learning unfamiliar grammatical structures, new words, confusing writing systems, and seemingly “nontraditional instructional approaches” (Oxford, 1990, p. 136). Most of the instructors at UGRU are graduates of Universities in English speaking countries. These professional and experienced instructors use a variety of non-traditional instructional approaches to help their students become better learners of the language. Accordingly UAEU's EFL learners try to find ways to use English, monitor themselves when they make mistakes and try to avoid making them again, always look for way to become better learners of English, and they keep thinking about their progress in learning. This reflects an interest in language learning where students have to make decision on what they need to learn, how to overcome the difficulties they face when learning English, and how to conduct their learning processes. It also means that language learning strategy training should be able to help these students become better language learners. The metacognitive strategies that require concern and might be a place for further training by classroom instructors are activities that train students on goal setting and planning of their studying, offer them opportunities to talk in English, and encourage them to read in English. Planning instruction and setting learning objectives is of major importance to both learners and teachers because it provides a sense of achievement and direction that would positively impact students' motivation to learn (Oxford, 1990).

Social strategies (items 45-50) came in the second place ($M = 3.24, SD = .90$), which was consistent with research findings of other Arab EFL learners. Khalil (2005) investigated the language learning strategies use of university English-as-a-foreign-

language learners in Palestine, using Oxford's (1990) SILL. The results showed that metacognitive and social strategies ranked the highest. However other studies had results inconsistent with these findings. Radwan (2011) investigated the use of language learning strategies of students majoring in English at a university in Oman. Results showed that social and memory strategies ranked the least frequently used strategies among participants. These strategies help learners interact, communicate, cooperate, and empathize with others to maximize learning (Oxford, 1990). In this study, the most frequently used social strategy was, "*I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.*" ($M = 3.39, SD = 1.18$), and the least frequently used social strategy was, "*I practice English with other students.*" ($M = 2.98, SD = 1.24$). Social strategies are considered of the strategic tools to improve communication skills and interpersonal behaviors such as asking questions, asking for clarification and help, and talking with native speakers (Yang, 2010). In an earlier study, Yang (1996) indicated that preference for social strategies can be attributed to the learners' extensive exposure to computer, multimedia, and networking technologies. This researcher adds to that the widespread use of the mobile technologies, the internet and social networks which are very prevalent among the UAE population in general and the youth in particular. UAEU's EFL students did not seem to mind seeking help from English speakers (most likely their teachers), but might be reluctant to use their knowledge in English to practice or seek help from other students. A possible explanation is that Emirati EFL students probably feel ashamed or shy from making mistakes in front of other students.

Compensation Strategies came third in place ($M = 3.15, SD = .74$), which was consistent with research findings on other Arab EFL learners (Riazi, 2007), but

inconsistent with others (McMullen, 2009; Radwan, 2011; Salem, 2006; Abu Shmais, 2003). These strategies enable learners to use the language to overcome any limitations or gaps in their linguistic knowledge (Oxford, 1990). The most frequently used strategy was, *"If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same."* ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.03$). Despite the fact that the overall mean score of compensation strategies category was medium, this individual strategy showed a high frequency use. In fact, it scored the highest among the fifty strategies of the SILL. One possible explanation for the high use of this individual strategy could be attributed to the culture of the UAE where students are more concerned in communicating with an expanding expat population that uses English as means of communication among different nationalities inside and outside the classroom environment. The least frequently used strategy was, *"I read English without looking up every new word."* ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.58$). This reflects a strategy seldom used, and an urge to know the meaning of every word within a reading text which could be attributed to the nature of instruction these students have received in school which focuses on memorization and rote learning. The researcher believes that UAEU EFL students seem to place a great importance on learning every word in the context whether it is a key word or not, thus; memorizing is frequently used by students who learn the language as isolated fragments.

Memory strategies were the least preferred strategies ($M = 2.69$, $SD = .69$), which was consistent with research findings on other Arab EFL learners (Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh, & Alshboul, 2010; Radwan, 2011;) but inconsistent with others (McMullen, 2009; Riazi, 2007; Salem, 2006; Abu Shmais, 2003; Khalil, 2005). Memory strategies help learners remember, store and retrieve new information (Oxford, 1991). Six of the nine memory

strategies fell under the medium range of use, while three indicated low strategy use.

These lowest range strategies were, “*I use rhymes to remember new English words, I use flashcards to remember new English words, and I physically act out new English words.*”

Memory strategies help students remember more effectively and the findings of this research may indicate that UAEU's EFL students do not use such strategies effectively or might not be familiar with those strategies suggested by the SILL. Due to instructional and cultural reasons, the low range of use of the three least used memory strategies can be justified. Flash cards are not popular among Emirati EFL learners. Using rhymes and acting in order to remember new words, might not be an acceptable social behavior in the UAE culture and Emirati EFL learners might be using other strategies than those examined by the SILL. Consequently, further research is necessary to investigate this area.

The second least preferred strategy reported was Cognitive Strategies ($M = 2.91$, $SD = .73$). This is inconsistent with research findings on other Arab EFL learners (McMullen, 2009; Riazi, 2007; Salem, 2006; Abu Shmais, 2003; Khalil, 2005; Radwan, 2011; Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh, & Alshboul, 2010). Cognitive Strategies help learners understand and produce new language through practicing, summarizing, reasoning deductively, and analyzing (Oxford, 1990). Means, and standard deviations showed medium use of strategies except for one strategy that showed a low range which was, “*I read for pleasure in English*”. Cognitive strategies are of major importance to language learning. These strategies includes skills that require the learners' use all of their mental processes such as repeating, practicing with sounds and writing systems, using formulas and patterns, recombining familiar items in new ways, practicing the new language; skimming and scanning; using reference resources, looking for patterns, and so on.

Emirati EFL learners at UAEU could make use of intensive training on cognitive strategies. One justification for cognitive strategies ranking second least preferred strategy might be attributed to the nature of instruction in UGRU which is focused more on learner's passing exams and IELTS preparation, rather than "learning" the language.

Affective strategies ranked the third least used strategies ($M = 2.91, SD = .73$).

This was consistent with some research finding on other Arab EFL learners (Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh, & Alshboul, 2010), but inconsistent with others (McMullen, 2009; Riazi, 2007; Salem, 2006; Abu Shmais, 2003; Khalil, 2005; Radwan, 2011). These are strategies that help learners lower their anxiety levels, increase motivation, and control their emotions (Oxford, 1991). Most of the affective strategies examined fell under the medium range, except for one strategy that indicated a low range of use, "*I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.*"

When examining the correlation among the six categories of the SILL, the strongest positive relationship was between social and metacognitive strategies ($r = .72$). This could mean that Emirati university learners who preferred to use more social strategies were more likely to use metacognitive strategies, and vice versa. Social strategies help learners interact, communicate, cooperate, and empathize with others to maximize learning (Oxford, 1990), and are considered of the strategic tools to improve communication skills and interpersonal behaviors such as; asking questions, asking for clarification and help, and talking with native speakers (Yang, 2010), while metacognitive strategies help learners play a major role in making decisions and goal setting of their language learning, choosing learning tasks, finding task-related learning resources, making decisions about strategies suitable for the tasks, and assessing their language

learning process. This is a very useful combination that brings more focus on learning English effectively and utilizing this knowledge to interact efficiently.

The weakest relationship was between affective and compensation strategies ($r = .43$). Affective strategies help learners lower their anxiety levels, increase motivation, and control their emotions, while compensatory strategies enable learners to use the language to overcome any limitations or gaps in their linguistic knowledge. This can be an indication that Emirati students may need to be provided with training on strategies that would enable them control their feelings, increase their motivation, and overcome negative attitude toward language learning, so as to enable them to start taking risks and compensate for any gaps or limitations in their knowledge.

Differences in the use of English learning strategies by language proficiency level.

This research investigated the relationship between language learning strategy patterns and language proficiency in terms of level one (beginning), level two (intermediate) and level three (advanced). The findings indicated that there was no significant relationship between the two factors.

There are possible reasons that proficiency level variable did not affect the language learning strategy use. English language Instruction at UGRU might be directed at raising the students' level in listening, speaking, reading and writing. In addition, instruction could be tailored to assist learners in achieving the required score of the IELTS exam which is the prior requirement before they can commence their undergraduate studies. One possible reason might be that learners at the three levels are trained on the same set of strategies and skills, thus the analysis showed no significant difference among

the three levels examined. In addition, curriculum and instructional materials could have been designed, arranged, and introduced in the same way in order to serve the same purpose, i.e. to pass the exam.

The significant differences in the use of English learning strategies between male and female students.

The analysis of results indicated that there were no significant differences between male and female students.

There are possible reasons that gender did not affect the language learning strategy use. One reason might be that English language is important to both male and female Emirati EFL learners, and that they both consider English language proficiency as an important factor in their life, propelling them to use a variety of strategies while learning English. In this study, although there was no significant mean difference between male and female learners, the mean scores of male learners in each of the six categories were slightly higher than the mean scores of female learners. Both male and female students reported preferring to use metacognitive strategies the most and memory strategies the least.

Looking at individual strategy use, both male and female students reported high frequency of similar strategies except in that male students reported additional two cognitive strategies (*I try to talk like native English speakers, I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English*). And one affective strategy (*I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake*). Female students used one compensatory strategy; that was not reported by male learners (*I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English*).

One possible reason for the male-female differences in individual strategy patterns might be attributed to cultural factors particular to the UAE society. Male learners could be more interested in sounding like a native speaker, and might have the liberty and time to go to the movies, and could be more interested in watching English spoken TV shows. They might also be expected to communicate and interact with English language speakers outside the University, i.e. market and workplace. They might be more encouraged to use the language even when they are afraid to make mistakes. Female learners might be influenced by different cultural factors where they could often have to make up new words when they do not know the right words in English in order to keep the communication process flowing.

Implications

English language has been considered one of the key elements in the pursuit of the UAE to move into the knowledge based economy and in order to keep up with the trends towards adapting English in schools worldwide.

English is a compulsory subject in the UAE educational system. The best example of encouraging English use in schools is that Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) is hiring native English speaking teachers to teach the subjects of English, Math, and Science, something that would add more importance to English language learning and instruction.

At the university level, the outcomes of the education system still affect the level of Emirati students seeking undergraduate education. Students would have to achieve a band score of 5.0 on the IELTS exam before they can commence their undergraduate studies, a requirement that many students were not able to achieve without going into an

intensive English language program. The UAEU's Communication Program is designed to assist student in achieving this result through the University General Requirements Unit (UGRU). The nature of English language instruction at UGRU is designed to assist students in scoring the 5.0 band score on the IELTS; thus, exiting the English language training at UGRU. This situation has created demand to develop effective learning and teaching models in UGRU's curriculum. Similarly, students and instructors have given more consideration to English learning strategies in order to help EFL Emirati learners achieve the required proficiency in English. Despite the intensive research on language learning strategies in the Arab world, little has been done to examine the EFL learners' English learning strategies in the UAE context. Similarly, very few studies have been conducted to investigate individual differences that affect English learning strategy use based on English proficiency and gender.

This study tried to provide EFL instructors and curriculum planners with researched information on strategies frequently used by Emirati EFL University learners. The findings of this study provide a better understanding of strategy use among Emirati EFL learners. In general EFL university students seemed to be aware of the importance of learning English and were applying some kind of measures to facilitate their own learning.

In this research, Emirati EFL university students favored using metacognitive strategies, followed by social, compensation, affective, cognitive and memory strategies, respectively. Further training on language learning strategies might be required in order to help these students become better learners of English. For example, providing training in social strategies would enable students to go beyond the learner-teacher interaction and encourage learner-learner interaction, something that could have a positive impact on their

communication skills and boost self-confidence, while providing training on compensation strategies may allow learners to guess the meaning of new vocabulary from context by trying to understand the whole meaning and not every single word. It might also encourage students to find other ways to get the message across despite limited knowledge by using gestures, synonyms, or coining new words, etc. EFL learners at UAEU could also benefit from intensive training on how to manage and control their emotions while learning a language. Lack of training on affective strategies might lead for the students to feel frustrated easily, and probably less motivated to learn the language (Oxford, 1991). Providing training on affective strategies would assist students on managing their own emotions while learning the language something that could push them to work harder, become more motivated, and rid them of negative attitude towards the language. For UGRU's curriculum developers, this might suggest that the English language curriculum should focus on metacognitive and social strategy training. Special attention should be given to affective, cognitive and memory strategies. These are strategies that would assist students remember more effectively, use all mental processes, and manage their emotions.

This study also revealed that memory strategies, which might have often been thought to be an Arab EFL learners' typical strategies in English learning, may not be the case anymore. The least preferred strategies used by Emirati EFL learners were memory strategies. This might imply that these learners do not favor memorizing when learning English. It might give an indication that UGRU's curriculum planners and English instructors should find more effective and efficient strategies to help Emirati EFL learners become better learners of English. In this study, proficiency level and gender were not

factors, nor did they affect the outcomes of researching UAEU's EFL learners' strategy use.

The findings of this study should contribute in the efforts to a better understanding of the overall strategies used by Emirati EFL University learners. Teachers of English as a foreign language can utilize the outcomes of this study to reflect on the compatibility of their instructional techniques and teaching practices with strategies most frequently used by learners. Curriculum planners might find the finding of this research beneficial when planning the curriculum, and compel them to consider integrating strategy training within the curriculum.

It is worth mentioning that the findings of this study are exclusive to EFL learners at the UAEU and should not be generalized to include all EFL university learners in the UAE. Hence, EFL instructors and curriculum planner might find the results of this study beneficial when designing English language instruction and curriculum plans.

Recommendations for Further Studies

The following are recommendations for further research:

1. The current research was conducted on the UAEU communication program students, conducting the same research on universities other than the UAEU would make it possible to generalize the findings on UAE EFL students.
2. This research was conducted on students who had not yet achieved the required IELTS score to be able to graduate from the English language program. Other studies could be conducted on students at various levels in the English language department or translation department at the university.

3. This study examined the influence of gender and proficiency level at UGRU on language learning strategy use. Further research is required to assess the influence of other factors such as learning styles, motivation, and cultural background.
4. This research used only quantitative research method, further research might consider combining qualitative along with quantitative research method in order to get a more comprehensive view of the research results.

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APPENDIX A: Background Information Questionnaire

القسم الأول: معلومات أساسية

1. الجنس:
- ذكر
- أنثى
2. العمر:
- 16 - 17
- 18 - 19
- 20 - 21
- 22 - 23
- 24 - فما فوق
3. الإمارة:
- أبو ظبي
- دبي
- الشارقة
- رأس الخيمة
- الفجيرة
- عجمان
- أم القيوين
- غير ذلك
4. تخصصك في الثانوية العامة:
- أدبي
- علمي
5. معدلك في الثانوية العامة:
- 50 - 59
- 60 - 69
- 70 - 79
- 80 - 89
- 90 - 100
6. مستواك الحالي في وحدة المتطلبات الجامعية UGRU:
- مستوى 1
- مستوى 2
- مستوى 3
7. كيف تقيم مستواك العام في اللغة الإنجليزية بالمقارنة مع أقرانك في نفس الصف؟
- ممتاز
- جيد
- متوسط
- ضعيف
8. تخصصك الجامعي:
- كلية العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية
- كلية العلوم
- كلية التربية
- كلية الإدارة والاقتصاد
- كلية القانون
- كلية الأغذية والزراعة
- كلية الهندسة
- كلية الطب والعلوم الصحية
- كلية تقنية المعلومات
9. هل تستمع بتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية؟
- نعم
- لا
- حيادي
10. معدلك في امتحان CEPA اللغة الإنجليزية:
- 150-159
- 160-169
- 170-179
- 180-210
11. هل ترغب في الحصول على تقرير يوضح لك النتائج الخاصة بك في هذا الاستبيان؟
- البريد الإلكتروني:

APPENDIX B: Arabic Version of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

(SILL)

Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL)

© R. Oxford, 1989

استبيان حول استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة

نموذج خاص لدارسي اللغة الإنجليزية من الناطقين باللغات الأخرى

التعليمات

هذا النموذج مُخصص لدارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية أو أجنبية. ستعرض عليك عبارات تتعلق بتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية يتعين عليك قراءتها. ضع إشارة ✓ في الصندوق الذي يعبر عن مدى انطباق هذه العبارة على حالتك.

1. لا تنطبق، أو نادر جداً ما تنطبق على حالتني.
2. أحياناً، تنطبق على حالتني (أقل من نصف الأوقات).
3. إلى حد ما، تنطبق على حالتني (تقريباً نصف الأوقات).
4. غالباً، تنطبق على حالتني (أكثر من نصف الأوقات).
5. دائماً تنطبق على حالتني

- لا تنطبق، أو نادر جداً ما تنطبق على حالتني ، تعني أن العبارة نادر ما تكون صحيحة. (تقريباً 0%)
- أحياناً، تنطبق على حالتني ، تعني أن العبارة صحيحة أقل من نصف الأوقات. (أقل من 50%)
- إلى حد ما، تنطبق على حالتني ، تعني أن العبارة صحيحة تقريباً نصف الأوقات. (تقريباً 50%)
- غالباً، تنطبق على حالتني ، تعني أن العبارة صحيحة أكثر من نصف الأوقات. (أكثر من 50%)
- دائماً تنطبق على حالتني ، تعني أن العبارة صحيحة تقريباً بشكل دائم. (تقريباً 100%)

أجب إلى أي مدى تنطبق هذه العبارة على حالتك. تذكر أنه لا توجد هناك إجابة صحيحة أو خاطئة بين هذه العبارات، فلذلك لا تقم باختيار إجابة تعتقد بأنها هي الإجابة المثالية، ولا تختار إجابة تعكس ما يفعله الآخرون سواك. حاول الإجابة بسرعة وبعناية، حيث يستغرق إكمال الاستبيان عادةً ما بين 7 - 10 دقائق. إذا كان لديك أية استفسارات، اسأل المدرس في الحال.

القسم الثاني: استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية

	50%	25%	0%			
				لا تنطبق أو نادراً	أحيانا	إلى حد ما
ت						
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26						

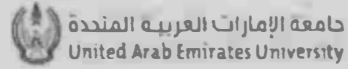
ضع إشارة ✓ حول مدى انطباق هذه العبارات على حالتك الخاصة أثناء تعلمك اللغة الإنجليزية

			→		
			0%	25%	50%
ت	الاستراتيجيات	لا تنطبق أو نادراً	أحياناً	إلى حد ما	
27	أقوم بالقراءة باللغة الإنجليزية دون البحث عن معاني جميع الكلمات الجديدة.				
28	إنشاء التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية، أحاول التنبؤ بما سيتحدث به الطرف الآخر.				
29	إذا لم أستطع تذكر كلمة إنجليزية ما، أحاول استخدام كلمة أو عبارة قريبة لها في المعنى.				
30	أحاول قدر الإمكان إيجاد طرق عدة لاستخدام لغتي الإنجليزية.				
31	أحاول إدراك أخطائي في اللغة الإنجليزية، كي أتداركها، وأحسن من مستواي.				
32	أصغي بانتباه لمن يتحدث باللغة الإنجليزية.				
33	أحاول أن أجد ما يجعلني متعلماً أفضل للغة الإنجليزية.				
34	أعد برنامجي الدراسي بحيث يتوفر لدي الوقت اللازم لدراسة اللغة الإنجليزية.				
35	أبحث عن أشخاص يمكنني التحدث إليهم باللغة الإنجليزية.				
36	أبحث عن فرص للقراءة باللغة الإنجليزية قدر الإمكان.				
37	لدي أهداف واضحة لتحسين مهاراتي في اللغة الإنجليزية.				
38	أفكر بالتقدم الذي أحرزه في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.				
39	أحاول تهدئة نفسي كلما شعرت بالخوف من استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية.				
40	أشجع نفسي على التحدث بالإنجليزية حتى لو كنت خائفاً من أن أخطئ.				
41	أكافئ نفسي كلما أصبحت أفضل في اللغة الإنجليزية.				
42	أدرك إن أصابني التوتر خلال دراستي أو استخدامي للغة الإنجليزية.				
43	أدون مشاعري في مفكرة خاصة بتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.				
44	أتحدث إلى شخص آخر عن شعوري عندما أتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.				
45	إذا لم أفهم بعض ما يُقال باللغة الإنجليزية، أطلب من المتحدث أن يبطئ في الحديث أو أن يعيد ثانية.				
46	أطلب من الناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية تصحيحني عندما أتحدث.				
47	أمارس اللغة الإنجليزية مع طلاب الآخرين.				
48	أطلب المساعدة من الناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية.				
49	أطرح الأسئلة باللغة الإنجليزية.				
50	أحاول أن أتعلم عن ثقافة الناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية.				

انتهى

APPENDIX C: Permission to conduct research by UAEU Scientific Research
and Ethics Committee

UAEU



No: VPRGS/ 148 /2012
05/06/2012

To: Ahmed Al Khateeb

Subject: *English language learning strategies for UGRU students*

Dear Ahmed Al Khateeb,

Please be advised that the UAEU Scientific Research Ethics Committee, in its meeting No. 29 on June 4, 2012, reviewed the ethical principles involved in your submission.

The Decision reached is:

- Approved as is
 Not Approved
 Approved with the following comments

On behalf of the committee, I wish you every success with your study.

Sincerely,

Prof. Manfred Malrahn
Director of Research and Graduate Studies Support

APPENDIX D: Application for Ethical Approval

Office of the Vice Provost for Research & Graduate Studies

THIS STUDY MAY NOT BEGIN WITHOUT ETHICAL APPROVAL

Application for Ethical Approval

1a. Name and Department of the Principal Investigator:

UAE University
Faculty of Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

1b. Names and Departments of co-investigators:

NONE

2. Title of Study:

MA THESIS:
Language Learning Strategy Use of EFL Students in the UAE University Communication Program

3. Is this a retrospective study? YES / No.

If YES, explain:

NO

4. Type of study:

Survey

5. Will there be direct participant contact?

NO

6. Will you obtain written consent from each participant?

NO

7. Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?

YES

8. Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any stage?

YES

9. Will you tell participants that their confidentiality will be maintained and if published, the data will not be identifiable as theirs?

YES

10. Will you provide participants with information of the study?

YES (OPTIONAL)

11. Will you ensure that your project will not deliberately mislead participants?

YES

12. Are you confident that there is no realistic risk of any participant experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort?

YES

13. To whom and how do you plan to disseminate the results of the study (e.g. to participants, to faculty committee)?

FACULTY COMMITTEE

14. I certify that all information provided above is correct and that it will apply throughout the performance of the proposed research and that I shall be responsible for safeguarding the confidentiality of participants involved.

I am aware of the confidential nature of this information and will vouch for any person, other than myself, who will work with this information under my direction.

Signature of Researcher: _____
05 / 2012 /

Date: 13 /

Signature of co-investigators

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

Signature of Head of Department of Principal Investigator

NB: Please note the following documentation (if appropriate) MUST accompany the application for ethical approval. Incomplete submissions will not be considered.

- RESEARCH PROTOCOL (Background, objectives, methodology, duration of project, data analysis, distribution of results)
- FORMS

For Official Use

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

REASON:

—

—

Name:

Signature:

APPENDIX E: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Title of project:

Names of researchers:

1-

2-

3-

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated
(Version) for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw.
3. I understand that my data will be kept confidential and if published, the data will not be identifiable as mine.
4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant	Age	Date	Signature
---------------------	-----	------	-----------

Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature
-------------------------------	------	-----------

Name of witness (if subject unable to read/write)	Date	Signature
--	------	-----------

Name of parent/guardian/next of kin (where subject unable to give consent due to age or incapacity)	Date	Signature
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APPENDIX F: Application for Ethical Approval

RESEARCH PROTOCOL

(May 2012)

THESIS TITLE:

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY USE OF EFL STUDENTS IN THE UAE

UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATION PROGRAM

Researcher

Ahmad Z. Al Khatib

Faculty of Education

Curriculum and Instruction Department

United Arab Emirates University

May, 2012

PROTOCOL TITLE

Language Learning Strategy Use of EFL Students in the UAE University Communication Program

Protocol ID	
Short title	Survey: Language Learning Strategy Use of EFL Students in the UAE University Communication Program
Version	7.0
Date	13.05.2012
Principal investigator(s)	Mr. Ahmad Zuhair Al Khatib (MA Student) T: 050-1382993 UAE University Department of Curriculum and Instruction UAE

PROTOCOL SIGNATURE SHEET

Name	Signature	Date
<p>Thesis Supervisor:</p> <p>Dr. Sadiq Ismail</p> <p>For non-commercial research,</p> <p>Head of Department:</p>		
<p>Coordinating Investigator/Project leader/Principal Investigator:</p> <p>Mr. Ahmad Al Khatib</p>		

SUMMARY

Rationale

The UAE places a great emphasis on English language instruction, but despite the heavy time allocated to English language instruction in schools, students graduate from high schools fairly poor in English. Foundation programs place heavy burdens on the education budget of the country. UAE University for example spends more than third of its budget on the foundation program (Farah & Ridge, 2009). It is expected that effective language learning strategy training should be able to reduce the time students spend attending these programs and would lead to substantial budget cuts which would better be directed at scientific research. Research has also shown that successful learners of English have different strategy patterns than their less successful counterpart. There is a need to allocate these strategies, incorporate them into the UAE English curriculum, and train less successful learners on making use of these in order to help them become successful learners.

Objectives

The objective of this study is to investigate the frequency of English Language learning strategy use of EFL UAE university students, and to examine if gender and language proficiency variables correlate with English language learning strategies use of these students.

Study design

This study is designed to examine the frequency of English language learning strategies of 200 EFL Emirati university students through reporting on a self-rated survey

and the effects of gender, in addition to proficiency on strategy use as measured by the students' CEPA score. In order to achieve this, the study shall use an Arabic version of Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (version 7.0) in addition to a background information questionnaire

Study population

This study shall be conducted at the United Arab Emirates University in Al Ain, UAE. 200 students (males and females) are expected to participate in the study. All participants are enrolled in the University's General Requirements Unit (UGRU) Communication Program at the United Arab Emirates University during between April and June in the academic year of 2012. All participants are non-native speakers of English who began their study of the English language at the elementary school level and had studied English for up to eleven years. Their ages ranged between 19 to 26 years old.

Intervention

This research is an experimental research that utilizes a 3 x 2 factorial design. Students are expected to answer the items of the questionnaire. No Intervention.

Main study parameters/endpoints

The main complications might arise from time restrictions and students not being able to answer all items of the questionnaire carefully.

Nature and extent of the burden and risks associated with participation, benefit and group relatedness

Outcomes will be assessed by self-reported questionnaires. There are no risks associated with participation in the questionnaire.

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Researchers of English as a foreign language (EFL) for Arab college learners have always investigated ways, techniques, or skills that could help students become better learners of English. They have also noticed that some learners were more successful than others and that these learners used what is now called learning strategies (LS) better than less successful learners tended to use. Language learning strategies can be defined as “the conscious or semi-conscious thoughts and behaviors used by learners with the explicit goal of improving their knowledge and understanding of a target language” (Cohen, 2003, p. 280). Over the past three decades, Language Learning Strategies (LLS) have been a topic intensive research in the areas of foreign and second language acquisition.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research is to investigate what English language learning strategies are frequently used by Arab UAE EFL university students and the differences found in the use of learning English strategies by gender and language proficiency. Not all learners use the same strategies or should be trained on the same strategies as others. Which type of LLSs work best with what learners and in which context still require more research (Hisamoglu, 2000). Another important aspects is that in English language learning contexts . English as a second language (ESL) learning should be distinguished from English as a foreign language learning (EFL), in the same way as first language (L1) should be separated from second language (L2) acquisition (O’Malley, 1990) . In fact, there has been a lack of extensive research concerning EFL strategies which led mistakenly to ESL research outcomes being generalized and applied to EFL English language teaching and learning practices creating sometimes irrelevant learning

environments (Yang, 2010). A huge emphasis has been positioned lately on the research of social, psychological, and affective variables that improve or obstruct language learning success and achievement. Research has provided evidence that cultural factors; such as beliefs, moral values, traditions, language, and student behaviors such as attitude, motivation, and anxiety, etc., correlate with success in language learning (Harumi, 2002; Ok, 2003; Littlewood, 2001). The UAE places a great emphasis on English language instruction, but despite the heavy time allocated to English language instruction in schools, students graduate from high schools fairly poor in English. Consequently, in 2007 the Ministry of higher education and scientific research (MOHESR) introduced the Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA) for English in order to define which students are required for a foundation education to reinforce their English language skills before pursuit of undergraduate education in public universities. Foundation programs place heavy burdens on the education budget of the country. UAE University for example spends more than third of its budget on the foundation program (Farah & Ridge, 2009). It is expected that effective language learning strategy training should be able to reduce the time students spend attending these programs and would lead to substantial budget cuts which would better be directed at scientific research. Research has also shown that successful learners of English have different strategy patterns than their less successful counterpart. There is a need to allocate these strategies, incorporate them into the UAE English curriculum, and train less successful learners on making use of these in order to help them become successful learners. (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; Wharton, 2000). Gender is also found to be an important variable which correlates to language learning. Not many studies have been conducted in the UAE and

the region using English Language learning strategy in correlation to gender (Radwan, 2011; Rahimi & Riazi, 2005; Riazi, 2007; Yang, 2010). Emirati women benefited greatly from the wide- range of educational opportunities offered to them by the state. The ratio of female to male pupils in all education stages up to the secondary stage for the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (the largest) increased from 95% in the school year 2000/2001 to 98.7% in the year 2009/2010 (Abu Dhabi Statistics Center, 2012). Although there has been some significant amount of research into strategy use all over the world, not many studies have been placed in EFL learning contexts such as the UAE. Outcomes of other ethnic groups should not be generalized as strategy use of Arab UAE EFL learners, a region that is still largely under researched (Riazi, 2007).

This study aims to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the general pattern of English language learning strategies used by EFL UAE University students?
2. What are the significant differences in the use of English learning strategies by language proficiency in terms of advanced, intermediate, and beginning levels determined by the national (CEPA) test?
3. What are the significant differences in the use of English learning strategies between male and female students?

STUDY DESIGN

This study was designed to examine the frequency of English language learning strategies of 200 EFL Emirati university students through reporting on a self –rated survey and the effects of gender, in addition to proficiency on strategy use as measured by the

students' CEPA score. In order to achieve this, the study used Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (version 7.0) in addition to a background information questionnaire

TIME SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

13 May 2012

The study will be started with acquiring the formal permissions from the concerned parties.

20 May 2012

The researcher will then approach teachers individually and inform them about details of conducting and distributing the questionnaire. Copies of Questionnaires will be made available to teachers

20-24 May 2012

Questionnaires filled out and collected back by researchers for analysis

STUDY POPULATION

This study will be conducted at the United Arab Emirates University in Al Ain, UAE. 200 students (males and females) are expected participated in the study. All participants are enrolled in the University's General Requirements Unit (UGRU) Communication Program at the United Arab Emirates University during between March and December in the academic year of 2012. The CEPA exam, which is the national university's entrance exam, shall be used as the criteria for acceptance in the program. All participants are non-native speakers of English who began their study of the English language at the elementary school level and had studied English for up to eleven years. Their ages ranges between 19 to 26 years old.

INSTRUMENTATION

The study used Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (version 7.0) in addition to a demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire shall comprise of close-ended question items which inquire about participant's age, gender, current English class level, college major, and the English CEPA score acquired. A self-reporting demographic questionnaire can provide information which can be linked and construed objectively through statistical data analysis (Yang, 2010). Research literature debates advantages and disadvantages of self-report questionnaire for factors such the effects of cultural background, lack of self-awareness, remembering and interpretations issues, in addition to the positive advantages of obtaining quantitative information (Griffiths, 2003; Dornyei, 1990; Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 1990). Prior to responding to the main questionnaire, subjects were requested to complete the demographic questionnaire which was translated into Arabic (Khalil, 2005; Shmais, 2003). Many researchers use a translated version of the questionnaire to make sure that the participants face no problems of understanding the items and response scales (Yang, 2010; Riazi, 2007). It took participants approximately five minutes to answer the demographic questions. The main instrument used in this research shall be Oxford's (1990) ESL/EFL version Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The SILL translation process went through five stages: translation, assessment 1, assessment 2, editing, and validation. The SILL is a five point Likert-scale paper-and-pencil inventory where participants score their own questionnaires. It is composed of fifty multiple choice questions that can be answered according to the following scale: 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. Based on a theory that views the learners as a whole person who possesses intellectual, social emotional and physical resources in addition to the cognitive/metacognitive information processing dimension, Oxford (1986) developed a six-set strategy system of L2 learning behaviors where she was able to identify hundreds of strategies each fitting under these six groups: Affective, social, metacognitive, memory-related, general cognitive, and compensatory (Oxford, 2002).

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning first appeared as an instrument for assessing the language learning strategies frequency use of students at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. There were two versions of the SILL, one for native speakers of English learning a foreign language (80 items) and an (ESL/EFL, 50 items) version for learners of English as a second or foreign language. Both were published in an appendix to Oxford's (1990b) learning strategy book for language teachers. The taxonomy of strategies consists of 50 statements about strategies used by language learners covering six broad categories of strategies, each represented by a number of items.

1. Memory Strategies (items 1-9): Strategies that help learners remember, store and retrieve new information.
2. Cognitive Strategies (items 10-23): Strategies that help learners understand and produce new language through practicing, summarizing, reasoning deductively, and analyzing.
3. Compensatory Strategies (items 24-29): Strategies that enable learners to use the language to overcome any limitations or gaps in their linguistic knowledge.
4. Metacognitive Strategies (items 30-38): Strategies that help learners control their own cognition and enable them maximize learning.
5. Affective Strategies (items 39-44): Strategies that help learners lower their anxiety levels, increase

motivation, and control their emotions. 6. Social Strategies (items 45-50): strategies that help learners to interact, communicate, cooperate, and empathize with others to maximize learning. In addition, Oxford (1990) developed a scale, which reflects the level of strategy usage: (1) High (3.5-5.0), (2) Medium (2.5-3.4), and (3) Low (1.0-2.4).

The SILL appears to be one of the most widespread summative rating scales most often used around the world to assess the use of language learning strategies (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) also noted that due to intensity of use in research, SILL seems to be extensively checked for reliability and validity and in many several ways.

The items in SILL are easy respond to, efficient measurement of varied strategy use and can measure the relationship between strategy use and other variables (Yang, 2010). Oxford's (1990) SILL has been employed in several research projects. The validity of the SILL has been measured and tested in studies all over the world (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). Numerous studies using the SILL have been conducted in the Middle East (Khalil, 2005; Riazi, 2007; Radwan, 2011; Yilmaz, 2010; Abu Shmais, 2003), however, very few where conducted in the UAE. Concurrent and predictive validity of the SILL has also been investigated by showing the significant relationship between the SILL and language performance tests (Yang, 2010). Concurrent validity applies to validation studies when the two measures are administered at roughly around the same time. The resulting correlation would be a concurrent validity coefficient. This is in contrast to predictive validity, where one measure occurs earlier and is meant to predict some later measure (Concurrent validity, 2011). Cronbach's alpha is of a reliability coefficient which is generally used as a measure of internal consistency or reliability of a

psychometric test score for a sample of examinees. SILL's reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, and it is reported to have a Cronbach's alpha of between: .90 to .93 with an average .95, a valid, significant correlate of language proficiency and achievement (Oxford, 1990; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995). When it comes to the validity of SILL in ESL/EFL contexts, Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) and Oxford (1996) reported high indexes of Cronbach's alpha reliability (0.91 to 0.94) across many cultural groups. In the middle east, Abu Shmais (2003) reported 0.83 using an Arabic translation of the SILL with a sample of 99 Palestinian University EFL learners. Khalil (2005) reported a Cronbach's alpha 0.86 using an Arabic translation of the SILL with a sample of 194 high school and 184 university English EFL learners in Palestine. In a study of 111 university students in Jordan (Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh and Sabri, & Alshboul, 2010) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81. Riazi (2007) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84 in a study that investigated the patterns of language learning strategy use among 120 female university students at a university in Qatar. And Yilmaz (2010) reported an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.84 in a study of 140 EFL university students in Turkey. None of the above mentioned studies fall in the range reported by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) and Oxford (1996) high indexes of Cronbach's alpha reliability (0.91 to 0.94). There is a need for more research to investigate the reasons for this discrepancy.

In this research an Arabic translation of the SILL will be used in order to allow the participants to respond accurately, avoiding any incorrect responses that might occur due to language barrier. Basically there are two options for translating a text; direct or literal, and oblique translation under which lies several translation techniques (Molina & Albir, 2002). Since the direct translation was not possible due to the different natures of both

English and Arabic, an oblique translation technique was used instead of the direct one. Keeping this in mind, the SILL translation process went through a committee approach (Douglas & Craig, 2007) of translation that comprised of five stages: translation, revision 1, revision 2, editing 1, and validation. First, the researcher translated the SILL into Arabic. Second & third, the Arabic-translated version was assessed against the source version by two English-Arabic translators, who were separately requested to evaluate the quality, appropriateness and equivalency of the translation compared to the original text. Fourth, the researcher and the two translators merged and agreed on the final version. And finally, the final Arabic version was then checked by an Arabic linguist for readability and clarity to be approved as a final product by the four members of the committee. An Arabic major professor read the final translation and provided minor remarks that were taken into account. Finally, the researcher approached three professors of education in the UAEU and asked for their feedback on the translation and format of the survey. Their remarks assisted in production of questionnaire in its final version.

To test the reliability of this Arabic translation of the SILL, the researcher shall measure Cronbach's alpha coefficients with 200 EFL UAE learners; 0.84 (expected), which might show the same level of reliability as in other Arabic versions of the SILL used in previous studies (Khalil, 2005; Radwan, 2011; Shmais, 2003; Riazi, 2007; Al-Shaboul, Asassfeh and Sabri, & Alshboul, 2010)

DATA COLLECTION

Prior to the initiation of this study, the researcher shall contact the director of The University General Requirements Unit (UGRU) at the United Arab Emirates University and explain the purpose of conducting this research. After acquiring the required

permissions to conduct this research study, the classes shall be randomly chosen. The researcher then shall contact classroom instructors and gave them detailed information about the survey and ask for their permission to administer the survey to all their students. Teachers shall give participants the survey pack, that contains a covering letter, a demographic questionnaire, the Arabic translation of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, and a return envelope. Classroom instructors shall give the participants directions on how to complete the survey. The covering letter confirm that participation in the survey was voluntary and would have no impact on their grades.

The confidentiality of the survey responses will be explained to all students who are also informed that their classroom instructors shall not have access to their survey responses. All surveys would be kept in a locked cupboard at the researcher's office. After the data analysis, the surveys would be kept in a safe place for three years that would be accessible to the researcher only. Classroom instructors shall explain to the participants how to respond to the survey. In the demographic questionnaire, participants were requested to provide answers to the questions. As for the SILL, participants shall be informed that they had to mark a response number ranging from one to five. The participant are expected to spend approximately 7-10 minutes to complete the survey. They will then be requested to place the surveys into the envelope attached with each individual survey. The classroom instructors shall collect the envelopes and bring them back to their offices after which they will be handed to the researcher.

ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Data analysis shall be performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) version 19.0 for windows. To answer research questions the following tests

shall be performed at .05 level of significance: one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), independent t-tests.

Descriptive statistics; mean, frequencies, and standard deviation shall be used to process demographic data analyses and to analyze the overall strategy use, the most and least used strategy items, and strategy use in six categories. Chi-square tests shall be processed in order to measure variation of the frequency of use in language learning strategies by UAE EFL university students,

This is an experimental research with 3 x 2 factorial design. Proficiency levels and gender are the independent variables. The dependent variables are the mean scores of the entire SILL items and the mean scores of each of the six categories measured by the SILL. Proficiency has three levels (level 1(low), level 2 (medium), and level 3(High). To determine if there are any significant variations among these three levels, ANOVA analysis shall be conducted at $p < .05$ significance. T-test analysis shall be performed to determine if there were significant differences in overall learning strategy use concerning the gender variable.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASPECTS AND PUBLICATION

HANDLING AND STORAGE OF DATA AND DOCUMENTS

The self-reported questionnaires shall be entered into a database. For the present study all relevant data will be entered into a separate anonymous password protected database. Protection of participants identity will be guaranteed by not asking participants to provide any personal information that might reveal their identities. Furthermore, each participant shall be assigned a study specific unique numbers. The codes will only be known to the principal researcher.

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عنوان الرسالة

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في جامعة الإمارات العربية المتحدة

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أحمد زهير أحمد الخطيب

إلى

جامعة الإمارات العربية المتحدة

استكمالاً لمتطلبات الحصول على درجة الماجستير في التربية

المناهج وطرق التدريس – لغة إنجليزية

يناير 2013