Language Learning Strategies Employed by English Majors at Qatar University: Questions and Queries

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Abstract

This study discusses the type and frequency of language learning strategies used by Qatar University English majors. The subjects were 120 Arabs enrolled in the Department of Foreign Languages representing different learning levels (Year 1-4). Oxford (1990a: 293-300) Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire was used. The results showed that the students used learning strategies with high to medium frequency. They preferred to use metacognitive strategies most (75.3%), whereas they showed the least use of affective strategies (58.6%). In general, the results indicate that Level and Proficiency have differences on the use of some strategies. The differences, however, are insignificant. The article concludes by recommending that more training should be given in using all strategies by embedding them into regular classroom activities.

Abstract in Malay

Kajian ini membincangkan jenis dan kekerapan strategi pembelajran bahasa yang digunakan oleh pelajar-pelajar pengkhususan Bahasa Inggeris di Universiti Qatar. Mereka yang terlibat ialah 120 orang pelajar berketurunan Arab yang belajar di Jabatan Bahasa Asing, mewakili pelbagai tahap (Tahun 1-4). Soalselidik Iventori Strategi Pembelajaran Bahasa (Oxford, 1990a: 293-300) telah digunakan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan para pelajar telah menggunakan strategi pembelajaran pada kadar tinggi ke sederhana. Mereka lebih gemar menggunakan strategi metakognitif (75.3%) dan kurang menggemari strategi afektif (58.6%). Secara amnya, hasil kajian menunjukkan Tahap dan Kecekapan adalah berbeza dalam penggunaan strategi walaupun perbezaannya tidak signifikan. Sebagai kesimpulan, artikel ini mencadangkan lebih banyak latihan diberi dengan menggunakan semua strategi dan menerapkannya dalam aktiviti biasa bilik darjah.

Keywords

Language learning strategies, ESL/EFL, Language proficiency/achievement, English majors, Arab students, Qatar University

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1. Introduction

Teachers assumed that if they did their job of teaching well, students would certainly learn the target language. However, it became clear that if students were not learning or not motivated to learn, it may not matter how well the teachers are teaching. Thus, it is noticed that within the field of education during the last two decades, a gradual significant shift has taken place, resulting in less stress on teachers and teaching and greater emphasis on learners and learning (Nunan, 1988). Bearing this realisation in mind, an effort has emerged to improve language teaching methodology by shifting the domain of language teaching to focus on the learner. This shift was influenced by the Cognitive view of learning, which regards language learning as a dynamic, creative process and the learner as an active strategy user and knowledge constructor (Corder, 1981). In student centred teaching, planning, teaching and assessment were centred on the needs and abilities of students. The main idea behind the practice is that learning is most meaningful when topics are relevant to the students' lives, needs and interests and when the students themselves are actively engaged in creating, understanding, and connecting to knowledge (McCombs and Whistler 1997).

Increased interest in student-centred learning approaches amongst language educators led to numerous studies investigating individual learner differences (Brown, 1981; Ellis, 1986; Gregerson, 2000). A variety of factors were identified, such as those relating to the characteristics of the learners and of the learning situation (Bialystok 1981: 24). Among the factors relating to learner characteristics, the study of language learning strategy use became one of the most prominent issues in the field of second language acquisition (McDonough 1995: 5). Studies indicated support for appropriately applied language learning strategies on SL/FL achievement (Green and Oxford, 1995; Griffiths and Parr, 2001; Mansanares and Russo, 1985; Oxford, 1990a; Oxford and Ehrman, 1995; Oxford and Nyikos, 1989; Park, 1997and Wharton, 2000).

The idea that there were a set of strategies used often consciously by language learners to help them learn language was not new. Researchers studied the language learning strategies used by good language learners with the assumption that, once identified, such strategies could be imparted to less successful learners. Also, it can help to ease the burden to learning because by definition strategies were "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more

transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990b: 8). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) considered strategies as tools for active, self-directed involvement needed for developing FL communicative ability. Holec (1981) argued that learning strategies can foster learners' autonomy in language learning. Strategies can also assist learners in promoting their own achievement in language proficiency (e.g. Bremner, 1998; O'Malley et al., 1985 and Politzer, 1983). Therefore, emphasis on helping students to take more responsibility for meeting their own language learning needs was also heightened. Students were asked to self-direct the language-learning process and become less dependent on the classroom teacher. Many studies were done in an attempt to identify "strategies and other features presumed to be essential for all 'good L2 learners'" (Oxford, 1994: 3) and in trying to establish a relationship between these and successful language learning (Bremner, 1999).

2. Purpose of the Study

In the ESL area particularly, research into language learning strategies (LLS) has received considerable attention (Oxford 1989). Examining what strategies learners use leads to exploring how to help learners enhance strategy use. "Reaching generalizations, however, regarding the relationship between learning strategies and a multitude of variables has not been achieved" (El-Dib, 2005: 85). In addition, most of the language strategy research studies have been undertaken in the target language setting, i.e. learning English in the West (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006). There is only a handful in the extant literature which focuses specifically on the LLSs of students learning English in a foreign environment, mainly in the Arabic setting (Kaylani, 1996; Diab, 2000; Abu Shmais, 2003; Al-Otaibi, 2004; El-Dib, 2004; Aziz Khalil, 2005); Salem, 2006; Riazi, 2007 and Eslami and Al-Buainain, 2009). In fact, the scarcity of research on the language learning strategies of Arab students in Qatar encouraged the researcher to investigate these strategies in the light of the research questions mentioned below and in relation to culture. Findings of the study would have implications for learning (as well as for teaching) English by Arabs, mainly in Qatar, which could be defined as a "hybrid context" which, therefore, "fits neither the description of a second language setting nor that of a foreign language environment" (Green and Oxford 1995: 268). In Qatar, different nationalities from different language backgrounds use English as a means of communication. Exploring what strategies learners are/not using in one of the Arabian Gulf states might help in examining further the cultural issues implied in SILL and present more data for cross-cultural comparisons. The study can also add more to our understanding of the relationship between learning strategies and language achievement because it revisits the links between both in which there were "contradictory findings and unresolved discrepancies" (El-Dib, 2004: 85).

3. Research Questions

1) What are the most/least frequently used strategies for the entire group?
2) Is there any significant difference between strategy use and proficiency (University_Average, Level/Year of Learning and Self-efficacy)

4. Method

4.1 Instruments

In this study, the instrument used for collecting data on strategy use was Oxford's (1990b:293-300) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which was devised as an instrument for assessing the frequency of use of LLSs by students. As documented in literature, the SILL is one of the most useful manuals of learner strategy assessment tool currently available. Many studies have used the SILL which appears to be the only language learning strategy instrument that was checked for reliability ranging from .85 to .98 and validated in multiple ways (Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995). Once completed, the SILL data furnishes a composite score for each category of strategy. A reporting scale can be used to tell teachers and students which groups of strategies they use the most in learning English: (1) "high usage" (3.5–5.0), (2) "medium usage" (2.5–3.4), and (3) "low usage" (1.0–2.4) (Oxford, 1990b: 293-300).

There are two versions: one for native speakers of English (80 items) and another for EFL/ESL learners (50 items). Each item is a statement saying "I do..." (e.g., "I pay attention when someone is speaking") and students respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Never or almost never true of me") to 5 ("Always or almost always true of me"). The version of the SILL used in this study is the 50 item instrument in which strategies are grouped into two types: Direct strategies and Indirect strategies.

Direct strategies (those which directly involve the Target Language [TL] such as reviewing and practicing) are again classified into: a) Memory strategies (9 items; Part A: Qs 1-9), which are used for entering new information into memory storage and for retrieving it when needed for communication. They are designed to help the learner to create schemata that will allow new information, mainly vocabulary, to enter and remain in long-term memory; b) Cognitive strategies (14 items; Part B: Qs 10-23), that are used for linking new information with existing schemata and for analysing and classifying it. Cognitive strategies are responsible for deep processing, forming and revising internal mental models and receiving and producing messages in the target language, and c) Compensation strategies (6 items; Part C: Qs 24-29), which include guessing and using gestures which are needed to overcome limitations in language learning since they are intended to make up for missing knowledge.

Indirect strategies (those which provide indirect support for language learning such as planning, co-operating and seeking opportunities) are, on the other hand, divided into: a) Metacognitive strategies (9 items; Part D: Qs 30-38), which are techniques used for organising, planning, monitoring, focusing and evaluating one's own learning. They "allow learners to control their own cognition" (Oxford, 1990 b: 135); b) Affective strategies (6 items; Part E: Qs 39-44), which are used for handling feelings, attitudes and motivations, and c) Social strategies (6 items; Part F: Qs 45-50), which are used for facilitating interaction by asking questions, and cooperating with others in the learning process.

Oxford's (1990b, pp. 293-300) strategies inventory of language learning (SILL) also includes a background questionnaire in which the students are asked to identify their university average, level of study, age and native language. In addition, the questionnaire asks the students to self-evaluate their proficiency in English. The remaining question items focus on students' language learning experience.

4.2 Subjects

The subjects of the study were 120 Arab students enrolled in the Department of Foreign Languages at Qatar University representing different learning levels (Year 1-4). The subjects were female students (no male students were enrolled in the department during that time) whose ages ranged from eighteen to twenty-two years. These learners had studied English formally for 8-9 years at school. All the subjects were to complete 120 credit hours (9 core curriculum courses, 38 compulsory courses and 24 elective courses) as part of their Bachelor's degree requirements in English Language and Literature. Some students were taking English courses including language skills in the first two years of study while others were taking literature and linguistics courses in their third or fourth year of study. There were 30 students in each year.

The students were also asked to report on their actual progress in English by providing their university cumulative average (UCA) of the English courses they had taken up to the point of completing the questionnaire. The averages were classified as follows: 90-100%=Excellent, 80-89%=Very Good, 70%-79%=Good, 60-69=Fair.

As a measure of language self-efficacy, the students were asked to rate themselves on a scale from one to four to indicate how successful they thought they were in English: 1=Excellent, 2=Very Good, 3=Good and 4=Fair. Certainly, individuals who believe that they are successful students also believe that their performance is high due to the use of good learning styles and strategies (Eccles, 1983; Schunk, 1985; Weiner, 1985). Eleven students perceived themselves as Excellent; sixty as Very Good; thirty eight as Good and eleven as Fair.

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The questionnaires were distributed by the researcher during students' regular English classes in the first semester, 2007/2008. The students were told that there were no right or wrong answers to any question and that their confidentiality was secured, and their response would be used for research purposes only. The subjects were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary. They did not give their names; only their age, university average and year were required. Learners were asked to respond to each item based on an honest assessment of their language learning strategy use. Students were required to indicate whether they enjoyed language learning or not. The researcher got back 120 questionnaires and their responses were analysed. Different statistical analyses were carried out.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Overall Strategy Use

The rank order of the learning strategies was calculated using the weight interval (Table 3) because it was more accurate than simply using the mean and the frequency of usage. As for the total sample: the means and percentages showed that metacognitive strategies had the highest percentage (75.30) indicating a high use of metacognitive strategies followed by cognitive (70.98), compensation (68.25) and social (65.08), while both memory (59.07) and affective strategies ranked the lowest (58.61). This is in accordance with Abu Shamis's (2003) study. We also noticed that two of the six strategy groups (metacognitive and cognitive) fell in the high range, while the other 4 strategy groups fell in the medium range. Although there were differences in level of use by strategy items, all means for the six strategy categories fell between 2.5 and 4.47 (Table 7) which is defined as medium to high use by Oxford (1990b).

Metacognitive strategies which involve exercising "executive control" over one's language learning through planning, organising, monitoring and evaluating help learners to gain control over their emotions and motivations related to language learning through self-monitoring. The subjects of this study, then, appeared familiar with the need to manage their learning processes and indicated that they were in control of focusing and evaluating their own learning behaviours inherent in most definitions of metacognition (Borkowski et al., 1987). According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), metacognitive (planning, organising) and cognitive (translating, analysing) strategies were often used together, supporting each other. The assumption was that using a combination of strategies often had more impact than single strategies (Flavell, 1979). As it could be noticed from Table 3, there is no much difference between using both.

The intensive learning environment of the programme (majoring in English) could be a prime contributor in several ways to the preferred use and

selection of both metacognitive and cognitive. In terms of metacognitive strategies, learners majoring in English programmes typically have a strong instrumental motivation for learning English. Unlike learners who might enrol in a foreign language for fun or self-advancement or because a language course was required, students were learning English to advance their academic and professional lives. The (self-imposed) threat of failing the programme was a strong motive for taking control of their learning. The sooner they graduated from the programme (which can only be accomplished by achieving adequate scores in English language), the sooner they could start working in different jobs. Efficient planning and self-monitoring of one's learning progress (both metacognitive behaviours) by the student were instrumental in achieving their goal of completion. As Pintrich and Garcia (1994) observed, metacognitive knowledge and increases in academic performance went hand in hand. The high frequency use of metacognitive strategies seemed to prove that they were essential for successful language learning since these strategies provided a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process (Oxford 1990b: 136), and helping them to seek practice opportunities. Thus metacognitive learning strategies keep learners on the right track of learning which was crucial in a foreign language input environment such as Qatar.

The findings of high frequency use of metacognitive strategies and least frequent use of memory strategies were consistent with the studies on English majors in China by Nisbet (2002), and Han and Lin (2000). It was also reported by Abu Shamis (2003), Aziz Khalil (2005) and Riazi (2007) whose subjects were Arabs. Moreover, it is similar to that observed among students from Asian countries like Japan, China, Korea and Taiwan as reported in some of the studies on Asian students (e.g., Sheorey, 1999; Liu, 2004).

Compensation strategies, which ranked the third, enable students to make up for missing knowledge in the process of comprehending or producing the target language, e.g. students used gestures when they had difficulty producing the language, and they would use a word or phrase that has equivalent meaning as an English word they cannot think of (i.e. made up new words when they did not know the right ones). Similar results were reported by Riazi, 2007), whose data was collected in 2000. He found a statistically significant difference between freshmen (mean=3.83) and sophomore (mean=3.35) use of compensation strategies. Two studies looking at students from Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (Klassen, 1994; Yang, 1994, cited in Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995: 9) also reported compensation strategies as being the most frequently used, falling in the high range of use.

The participants showed a strong preference for learning with others by asking questions and cooperating with peers. This was clearly indicated in the high use of social strategies (Table 3). The programme of English in the Department of Foreign Languages has (to a certain extent) a student-oriented

philosophy underpinning its curriculum. In terms of the participants' high-medium social strategy use, the environment – with high availability of native/ non-native English speakers around the students, the development of Qatari society and the importance of English language learning in the last few years in Qatar – and instruction as well as methodology strongly encourage and support more interactive learning for the sake of developing greater linguistic fluency. These findings are in line with those of Phillips' (1991) study of Asian ESL students who used social strategies more than affective and memory strategies.

The least favoured strategies by participants in this study were memory strategies and affective strategies. Although they rank the least favoured, both were of medium use. Low use of memory strategies was initially surprising in that these were largely in keeping with instructional delivery systems typically employed in many Arab countries which were frequently didactic and emphasised rote memorisation. However, further examination of the literature revealed that other studies also had contradictory findings to this perhaps too common assumption that students in a foreign environment had strong preferences for memory strategies rather than communicative strategies such as working with others, asking for help and cooperating with peers (e.g. Al-Otaibi, 2004; Wharton, 2000 and Yang, 1999).

Again the impact of the programme training as well as the development in methodology might have influenced changes in student strategy preferences. Another possibility is that memory strategies can be defined differently in different studies. Politzer and McGroarty (1985) found strong preferences of ESL learners for using memory strategies. They defined memory strategies as rote-memorisation of words, phrases and sentences. By contrast, the least used memory strategies in the SILL for the current study were not related to rote memorisation; rather they were items like acting out new vocabulary, using rhymes and creating a mental or spatial image (strategy items 6 and 7). These were less popular with the learners and thus not used as much or at all. Memory strategies that did rank higher were those such as reviewing English lessons frequently and using words in sentences – the more traditional study skills. Needless to say, rote memorising was frequently used by students who learn the language as isolated fragments. Example of such items were statement number (4) in SILL, *"I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used"* and statement number (9), *"I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board or on a street sign"* (Tables 7, 8 and 9 below).

As for the Affective strategies, these learners reported that despite efforts to relax when they were uncertain about speaking English, their fears of making a mistake often kept them from trying. The means, however, of the individual strategy items in this category showed a medium-high use (Tables 8 and 9).

Only one item was low in mean. The researcher believes that the use of some individual strategies could be attributed to culture, individual characteristics and educational system in Qatar where some students have very limited opportunities to use functional practice strategies especially in large classes. Moreover, students were more concerned with passing exams and respond to questions that were directly related to the content in their textbooks.

In order to determine the differences among all strategies, Sidak Test for multiple comparisons was used. The results indicated that there was a very highly significant difference at the level ($p < 0.000$).

Repeated MANOVA Wilks Lambda and Sidak tests were further used to determine differences across all the strategies. The results in Tables 5 and 6 reveal statistically significant differences at ($p < 0.01$) in the overall use of strategies by participants.

5.2 Variation of Strategy Use of Individual Strategy

Tables 7 and 8 present Strategy Preference of the items that constitute each strategy in addition to frequency of usage and mean of every single item. The tables clearly show that the learners were high and medium strategy users. There were only three strategy items which were considered to be on low scale usage. Most of the items with the highest means were metacognitive, for example, item numbers 32 (*I pay attention when someone is speaking English*), 33 (*I try to find out how to be a better learner of English*), 31 (*I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better*) and 30 (*I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English*). Item 15 (*I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English*) from the cognitive strategy got the highest mean (4.47) and was the first in rank order (Table 9). Item 29 (*If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing*) from the compensation strategy got a very high mean (4.20).

Table 8 presents rank ordering of the strategies according to their frequency of usage. Strategy number 6 which was the least favoured strategy with the lowest scale usage reads as "*I use flashcards to remember new English words.*" No wonder this strategy ranked the last with the lowest mean (1.80). Only 3 out of 120 students chose it "as always true to me." Strategy number 7 "*I physically act out new English words*" was also a low usage strategy. Both of these are memory strategies. Strategy number 43 "*I write down my feelings in a language learning diary*," which is an affective strategy item, was not frequently used having a mean of 2.43 and a rank order of 48 out of 50. Thus, the least used strategies included memory strategies like mime to remember and draw mental or paper pictures of words, which we would not have expected to be overly popular among the learners who were usually taught to use traditional techniques, such as writing repeatedly or mouthing words, rather than other memory strategies.

Neither "*I physically act out new English words*" nor "*I use rhymes to remember new English words*" were included in the students' learning strategies.

5.3 L2 Proficiency and Language Learning Strategy Use

Language proficiency has been measured in strategy research in different ways such as self-ratings of proficiency (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989), language proficiency and achievement tests (Phillips, 1991). In this study, language proficiency was examined as reflected by three individual variables: *university average, year of study* and *self-efficacy*. The following sections present results related to the second question: "Is there any significant difference between strategy use and proficiency?"

5.4 University Average *and* Language Learning Strategy Use

In this study the students were classified into four groups according to their University General Point Averages (UGPA) (Table 1). Those who scored an A grade and those who obtained grades B were grouped into the "high-achiever" group (more successful language learners). The two groups were merged, since there was one student in Level A and seven students in the latter. Those who scored a C grade were grouped into the "medium-achiever" group who represented 70% of the sample. Finally, students who obtained grades D were considered "low-achievers." Low achievers are less successful language learners and represented 22% of the sample.

The results of Table 9 showed that there were no significant differences on memory, cognitive, compensation, affective and social strategies use (p <.05) in relation to the students' university average. However, the computed F value on metacognitive strategies was (3.050) indicating that there are significant differences in the use of metacognitive strategies depending on University Average at (p <.05).

Scheffé's test was used to show comparisons between means of metacognitive strategies according to University Average. The results indicated that there was a significant difference at (p= 0.05) on Metacognitive strategies between the high-achievers (Excellent and Very good students) and low-achievers (Fair) in favour of the low-achievers. This means that the less proficient students used more metacognitive strategies. However, there were no significant differences between high-achievers (excellent and very good students) and good students, and good and fair students. The fact that students with good and fair university average tended to use metacognitive strategies more than excellent and very good students, was in accordance with Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006: 9) who reported that the most preferred strategy category for students in beginning and intermediate levels were metacognitive strategies.

Variation in terms of language performance was largely a positive variation (i.e. more successful learners report greater use of strategies than the less successful learners). However, in this study the results indicated that less proficient students used more frequently metacognitive strategies, i.e. they employed more executive control on their EFL learning to achieve a better proficiency. In this study, students who got fair (D=60-69) as an average were very eager to improve their language; they were highly motivated to achieve better proficiency. Otherwise, they would be expelled from the university due to lower performance. Thus, they used different strategies to achieve a better standard in English. In addition to this, it was well documented in the literature that use of strategies could be different according to various linguistic and cultural backgrounds (e.g., Oxford, 1990b; Abu Shamis, 2003).

5.5 Learning Level *and* Language Learning Strategy Use

There was a difference in the use of strategies according to learning level. Students in Year 4 used more memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive and social strategies than the students in lower levels (Table 11). As it was mentioned earlier, the advanced level students used more cognitive strategies than less proficient students. Such results indicated that more proficient students were aware of their needs and looked for more opportunities to practice the language. The use of more cognitive strategies by more proficient students could be attributed to these students' need to process and revise internal models in order to receive and produce the language. These students depended on repeating, analysing and getting the idea. Such strategies were necessary for English majors. It was interesting to note that students in advanced levels (Years 3 and 4) used social strategies more than any other levels. It could be that with increased proficiency came increased confidence, allowing the learners to interact with others by practicing their language knowledge to promote communicative skills. The high sense of confidence in learning English was likely to encourage students to use various strategies with more emphasis on the use of social and functional practice strategies (Yang, 1999).

Affective strategies were the least frequently used for fourth year students. One might claim that as learners reached a more advanced level, they had less need of affective strategies, or, that these were not really strategies for learning but simply features which exist among low-level learners (e.g. Year 1 students in Table 11). However, since this was the least frequently reported type for the total sample, it is perhaps difficult to conclude too much from this finding.

To determine the effect of Learning Level variable on strategy use, one way ANOVA was used. The results indicated that there were no significant differences on memory, cognitive, compensation, affective and social strategies

while there were significant differences on metacognitive strategies at the level of ($p < 0.05$), as shown in Table (12).

In order to measure how essential was the effect of learning level on strategy use, Scheffé's test was used to show comparisons between means of strategies according to learning level (Table 13).

The results indicate that there were no significant differences between means of metacognitive strategies according to learning level. Thus, the results (Tables 11 and 12) suggest that there is a positive relationship between language learning strategy use and learning level. The more advanced level students (3rd and 4th Year) reported greater strategy use than 1st and 2nd year learners, but the difference was not at the level of significancy.

5.6 Self-efficacy *and* Language Learning Strategy Use

Self-efficacy referred to personal judgments of performance capabilities to learn/perform behaviours at designated levels (Schunk, 1985: 208). As a measure of self-efficacy in this study, the students were asked to rate themselves on a scale from one to four to indicate how successful they thought they were in English: 1=Excellent, 2=Very Good, 3=Good and 4=Poor (Oxford, 1990b: 293-300). Table 14 shows the strategy means according to self-efficacy.

To determine the differences in strategy use according to self-efficacy, ANOVA test was used as in table 15.

There were significant differences found in the use of compensation strategies and metacognitive strategies according to self-efficacy (Table 15). The F-values (3.07) and (4.09) from ANOVA for self-efficacy between and within groups on strategy use were statistically significant.

To determine the significant differences in strategies according to self-efficacy, Scheffés test was used. The result showed that there was no significant difference on the compensation strategies. On the metacognitive strategies, however, there was a significant difference at ($p < 0.05$) between excellent on one hand, and good and fair on the other hand in favour of good and fair (i.e. students with good or fair university average used more metacognitive strategies than those with an excellent university average). However, there was no significant difference between excellent and very good, and good and fair (Table 16).

6. Conclusion

This study explored the use of learning strategies of a group of Arab English-major students at Qatar University. Significant differences by language performance in the respondents' use of all the strategy categories used were noted. The results showed that these students were high to medium users of strategies. The results in this preliminary study on strategy use indicated a high

preference for metacognitive strategies which helped the students in planning and organising their language learning. Furthermore, the statistical tests showed no significant difference for proficiency on overall strategy use.

7. Pedagogical Implications and Future Research Directions

1) Strategy instruction research is important in assessing learners' strategies; therefore, there is a need for conducting more research that will pave the way for building the theory that seems necessary for more language learning strategies work to be relevant to current foreign language teaching practice. Undoubtedly, there is a need for more comprehensive research on a wide range of variables affecting LLSs employed by Arab learners such as cultural background, beliefs, learning style, motivation, attitude, etc. Specifically, more research needs to be done on the use of language learning strategies for Qatari students learning English in schools and universities.

2) There is also a need for studies designed to identify the types of language learning strategies used by students learning the various languages including Arabic, English, French and Spanish (and other languages studied by Arab students) in Qatar. This is important if researchers and practitioners are to appropriately gauge the relative influence and importance of language learning strategies in learners' language learning process. Findings of such studies would have implications for teaching and learning languages by Arabs mainly in Qatar.

3) Strategy use reported by these learners indicated a high preference for metacognitive strategies which helped them in directing, organising and planning their language learning. Teachers can facilitate learning by addressing both content and process. This explicit attention to building strategic awareness in learners has been shown to be quite successful in enhancing their skills as learners (Keene and Zimmermann, 1997; Eslami-Rasekh and Ranjbari, 2003). Anderson believes that "Developing metacognitive awareness may also lead to the development of stronger cognitive skills" (2002: 1). The findings, however, do not seem to support that. In this study, the lower level students actually showed significantly more use of metacognitive strategies but their use of cognitive strategies was lower (though not significantly) than that of the higher level students. Thus, there is no evidence suggesting a high use of metacognitive strategies would lead to, or translate into, more use of cognitive strategies.

4) More proficient learners appear to use a wider range of strategies in a greater number of situations than do less proficient learners but in this study this finding is not backed by the statistical analysis results because the difference between the lower and higher level students was not at the level of significance. In fact, when a significant difference was found in the study between lower and

higher level students' strategy uses, e.g. in the use of metacognitive strategies, it was the low level students and students with a lower "self-efficacy" who actually used significantly more such strategies. The relationship between strategy use and proficiency is complex. Research indicates that language learners at all levels use strategies (Chamot and Kupper, 1989) but that some or most learners are not fully aware of the strategies they use or the strategies that might be most beneficial to employ. One pedagogical implication of this is that less successful language learners can be assisted to improve their language efficiency through learner training or strategy training.

5) The finding that learners at the lower level report more strategy use than the intermediate or advanced students indicates that learners at different levels have different needs in terms of teacher intervention in the learning process. For beginning learners, the teacher needs to be explicit in developing declarative and procedural knowledge that helps heighten understanding of the *what* and *how* of successful language learning. This metacognitive awareness of how students can control and positively impact their language learning must be supported until the crucial element of conditional knowledge is in place; only then can learners reach independence in their language learning. Relating daily learning tasks to students' prior knowledge of how they learn best is very important (Paris et al., 1994).

6) The importance of language learning strategies in language learning and teaching is very well documented in literature (e.g., Flavell, 1979; Green, and Oxford, 1995; Paris and Winograd, 1990; Eslami-Rasekh and Ranjbari, 2003). Since the amount of information to be processed by language learners is high in language classroom, learners use different language learning strategies in performing the tasks and processing the new input they face. Thus, the teacher's role in strategy training is essential. The goal of explicit teaching of learning strategies is to help students consciously control how they learn so that they can be efficient, motivated and independent language learners (Chamot, et al., 1999). Lessard-Clouston (1997) argued that when teachers have adequate knowledge about the students, their goals, motivations, language learning strategies and their understanding of the course to be taught, the language teacher, then, could provide a wide range of learning strategies in order to fulfil different learning styles that meet the needs and expectations of the students who possess different learning styles, motivations, strategy preferences, etc.

7) Practical actions can be taken by teachers in language classrooms in terms of integrating explicit and implicit strategy instructions into the regular lessons (Weaver and Chohen, 1994; Cohen et. al., 1996). Language learning strategies

are teachable (Oxford 1990b), thus both learners and teachers need to become aware of the learning styles and strategies through strategy instruction. Attempts to teach ESL students to use language learning strategies have produced good results (Rubin and Thompson, 1994). The main objective of such attempts is to allow students to become more aware of their preferred learning strategies and to help them become more responsible for meeting their own objectives. Such objectives can be only achieved when students are trained in strategy use so that they become more independent and effective. Students might benefit from strategy instruction that makes them more competent at using learning strategies and more proficient in the language. Thus, there is a need for providing learners with more opportunities to use a wide variety of strategies that are suitable to the various learning activities to raise learners' awareness of developing their strategic competence. Wenden described this cognitive process as "general knowledge about what strategies are, specific knowledge about when and how to use their effectiveness" (2001: 36).

8) The language teacher should also evaluate the textbooks and other materials s/he uses to see whether they already include language learning strategies or language learning strategies training. The language teacher should always look for new texts or other teaching materials which include language learning strategies.

9) In addition to the textbooks, the language teacher should revise his/her own teaching method and overall classroom style. Evaluating his/her lesson plans, the language teacher can determine whether or not his/her lesson plans give learners chance to use a variety of learning styles and strategies (Lessard-Clouston, 1997).

10) Another important factor is the high percentage of participants who said they liked English (114 out of 120). Teachers, university, schools and local school systems must make a greater effort to use this motivation if they want these students to develop real skill in using the language. Positive attitudes toward the language and being intrinsically motivated tend to enhance proficiency and achievement (Oller and Perkins, 1978).

11) Self-efficacy is another factor that affects motivation and achievement. Students' initial self-efficacy for learning is affected by their aptitudes, prior experiences and social supports (Schunk, 1995). Self-efficacy is typically defined as perceived capabilities within specific domains (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996). Research is needed on the extent that self-efficacy beliefs generalise from one domain to another and whether such generalisation varies as a function of development.

12) An important implication of this study is the need to provide all students with further opportunities to use LLSs more frequently since the overall strategy use by the subjects under study falls in the high and medium ranges. The less frequent strategies in this study (affective, social and memory) can form the core of a programme of classroom strategy instruction. Including the social and affective sides of learning along with the more intellectual sides help the SL learner since s/he is not just a cognitive and metacognitive machine but rather a whole person. In strategy training, teachers should help students develop affective and social strategies, as well as intellectually related strategies, based on their individual learning styles, current strategy use and specific goals. This could be partly achieved by encouraging collaborative learning which will certainly facilitate the use of language learning strategies and enhance the development of English skills. Particularly important is information on how students from different cultural backgrounds use language learning strategies.

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

14) Although the strategies inventory of language learning (SILL) can provide a broad idea of overall strategy use, the study of the effect of strategy use on proficiency perhaps does not require an instrument as comprehensive in its scope as SILL. It seems that what would be more appropriate is a procedure which longitudinally examines the effect of very particular strategies on localised aspects of proficiency in specific contexts.

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Appendix

Table (1): The Subject distribution according to UCA

UCA	Frequency	Per cent
Excellent	1	.8
Very Good	7	5.8
Good	85	70.8
Fair	27	22.5
Total	120	100

Table (2): The Subject distribution according to Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy	Frequency	%
Excellent	11	9.2
Very good	60	50.0
Good	38	31.7
Poor	11	9.2
Total	120	100.0

Table (3): Overall strategy use by the entire group

Strategies	Weight Interval %	Ranking
Memory	59.07	5
Cognitive	70.98	2
Compensation	68.25	3
Metacognitive	75.30	1
Affective	58.61	6
Social	65.08	4

Table (4): Multiple difference among all strategies

	Source	Sum Square	DF	Mean Square	F	P
All strategies	Between group	89248.061	5	17849.612	677.959	.000
	Within group	18798.517	714	26.328		
	Total	108046.58	719			

Table (5): Differences among ALL strategies

Strategy	mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Lambda Test	Sig.
Memory	26.58	4.68	17	42	2.68	0.01
Cognitive	49.68	6.72	30	67		
Compensation	20.48	3.64	10	29		
Metacognitive	33.88	6.09	19	45		
Affective	17.58	4.39	8	27		
Social	19.52	4.63	8	30		

Table (6): Differences among ALL strategies

	Strategy	Mean Differences	Confidence Level
Memory	1	-	-
	2	-23.10	0.01
	3	6.11	0.01
	4	-7.30	0.01
	5	9.00	0.01
	6	7.06	0.01
Cognitive	1	23.10	0.01
	2	-	-
	3	29.21	0.01
	4	15.80	0.01
	5	32.10	0.01
	6	30.16	0.01
Compensation	1	-6.11	0.01
	2	-29.21	0.01
	3	-	-

	4	-13.41	0.01
	5	2.89	0.01
	6	.95	-
Metacognitive	1	7.30	0.01
	2	-15.80	0.01
	3	13.41	0.01
	4	-	-
	5	16.30	0.01
	6	14.36	0.01
Affective	1	-9.00	0.01
	2	-32.10	0.01
	3	-2.89	0.01
	4	-16.30	0.01
	5	-	-
	6	-1.94	-
Social	1	-7.06	0.01
	2	-30.16	0.01
	3	-.95	-
	4	-14.36	0.01
	5	1.94	-
	6	-	-

Table (7): Strategy Preference of the items (from 1-50)

Item	Usage	Mean	Never or almost never true of me		Usually not true of me		Somewhat true of me		Usually true of me		always or almost always true of me	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	M	3.37	10	8.3	14	11.7	36	30.0	42	35.0	18	15.0
2	M	3.42	4	3.3	18	15.0	35	29.2	49	40.8	14	11.7
3	M	3.10	21	17.5	22	18.3	28	23.3	22	18.3	27	22.5
4	M	2.96	23	19.2	24	20.0	27	22.5	27	22.5	19	15.8
5	M	2.58	30	25.0	33	27.5	25	20.8	21	17.5	11	9.2
6	L	1.80	71	59.2	21	17.5	12	10.0	13	10.8	3	2.5
7	L	2.41	45	37.5	21	17.5	24	20.0	20	16.7	10	8.3
8	M	3.23	11	9.2	18	15.0	40	33.3	35	29.2	16	13.3
9	H	3.72	8	6.7	10	8.3	25	20.8	42	35.0	35	29.2

10	H	3.79	4	3.3	6	5.0	34	28.3	43	35.8	33	27.5
11	H	3.96	2	1.7	10	8.3	25	20.8	37	30.8	46	38.3
12	H	3.49	10	8.3	11	9.2	34	28.3	40	33.3	25	20.8
13	H	3.72	4	3.3	5	4.2	39	32.5	45	37.5	27	22.5
14	H	3.60	4	3.3	23	19.2	26	21.7	31	25.8	36	30.0
15	H	4.47	1	.8	4	3.3	13	10.8	22	18.3	80	66.7
16	H	3.62	6	5.0	16	13.3	29	24.2	36	30.0	33	27.5
17	H	3.83	3	2.5	10	8.3	29	24.2	40	33.3	38	31.7
18	H	3.59	8	6.7	16	13.3	25	20.8	39	32.5	32	26.7
19	M	3.21	16	13.3	21	17.5	25	20.8	38	31.7	20	16.7
20	M	2.80	9	7.5	37	30.8	50	41.7	17	14.2	7	5.8
21	M	3.43	6	5.0	19	15.8	40	33.3	27	22.5	28	23.3
22	M	3.25	16	13.3	18	15.0	32	26.7	28	23.3	26	21.7
23	M	2.93	17	14.2	31	25.8	33	27.5	22	18.3	17	14.2
24	H	3.83	3	2.5	9	7.5	34	28.3	34	28.3	40	33.3
25	H	3.47	12	10.0	14	11.7	31	25.8	32	26.7	31	25.8
26	M	2.53	36	30.0	23	19.2	29	24.2	25	20.8	7	5.8
27	M	3.22	16	13.3	17	14.2	27	22.5	45	37.5	15	12.5
28	M	3.23	12	10.0	30	25.0	22	18.3	30	25.0	26	21.7
29	H	4.20	5	4.2	5	4.2	12	10.0	37	30.8	61	50.8
30	H	3.89	5	4.2	9	7.5	29	24.2	28	23.3	49	40.8
31	H	4.04	5	4.2	4	3.3	26	21.7	31	25.8	54	45.0
32	H	4.46	1	.8	4	3.3	6	5.0	37	30.8	72	60.0
33	H	4.07	2	1.7	8	6.7	20	16.7	40	33.3	50	41.7
34	M	3.13	16	13.3	22	18.3	32	26.7	30	25.0	20	16.7
35	H	3.48	13	10.8	17	14.2	21	17.5	38	31.7	31	25.8
36	H	3.72	5	4.2	15	12.5	26	21.7	36	30.0	38	31.7
37	M	3.34	10	8.3	15	12.5	38	31.7	38	31.7	19	15.8
38	H	3.75	6	5.0	17	14.2	20	16.7	35	29.2	42	35.0
39	M	3.30	16	13.3	20	16.7	27	22.5	26	21.7	31	25.8
40	H	3.62	9	7.5	12	10.0	31	25.8	32	26.7	36	30.0
41	M	2.78	21	17.5	38	31.7	24	20.0	21	17.5	16	13.3
42	M	2.84	26	21.7	25	20.8	28	23.3	24	20.0	26	21.7
43	L	2.43	54	45.0	15	12.5	14	11.7	19	15.8	18	15.0
44	M	2.62	42	35.0	21	17.5	16	13.3	23	19.2	18	15.0
45	H	3.46	15	12.5	10	8.3	30	25.0	35	29.2	30	25.0
46	M	2.93	28	23.3	22	18.3	22	18.3	27	22.5	21	17.5
47	M	3.13	14	11.7	26	21.7	33	27.5	24	20.0	23	19.2
48	M	3.16	19	15.8	19	15.8	30	25.0	28	23.3	24	20.0

49	H	3.87	6	5.0	6	5.0	24	20.0	46	38.3	38	31.7
50	M	2.98	23	19.2	23	19.2	26	21.7	29	24.2	19	15.8

Scale of Usage: H=3.5-5; M=2.5-3.4; L=1.0-2.4 (Oxford 1990).
Memory=Q1-9; Cognitive=Q10-23; Compensation=24-29; Metacognitive=30-38; Affective=39-44; Social =45-50.

Table (8): Rank order of Strategy Preference (items 1-50)

Strategy	Item	Sum	WEIGHT	RANKIING
Memory	1	404.00	67.33	26
	2	411.00	59.17	39
	3	372.00	62.00	37
	4	355.00	68.50	25
	5	310.00	51.67	46
	6	216.00	36.00	50
	7	289.00	48.17	49
	8	387.00	64.50	31
	9	446.00	74.33	14
Cognitive	10	455.00	75.83	11
	11	475.00	79.17	6
	12	419.00	69.83	20
	13	446.00	74.33	15
	14	432.00	72.00	18
	15	536.00	89.33	1
	16	434.00	72.33	16
	17	460.00	76.67	9
	18	431.00	71.83	19
	19	385.00	64.17	33
	20	336.00	56.00	43
	21	412.00	68.67	24
	22	390.00	65.00	29
	23	351.00	58.50	40
Compensation	24	459.00	76.50	10
	25	416.00	69.33	22
	26	304.00	50.67	47
	27	386.00	64.33	32
	28	388.00	64.67	30
	29	504.00	84.00	3
Metacognitive	30	467.00	77.83	7
	31	485.00	80.83	5

	32	**535.00**	**89.17**	**2**
	33	**488.00**	**81.33**	**4**
	34	**376.00**	**62.67**	**35**
	35	**417.00**	**69.50**	**21**
	36	**447.00**	**74.50**	**13**
	37	**401.00**	**66.83**	**27**
	38	**450.00**	**75.00**	**12**
Affective	**39**	**396.00**	**66.00**	**28**
	40	**434.00**	**72.33**	**17**
	41	**333.00**	**55.50**	**44**
	42	**341.00**	**56.83**	**42**
	43	**292.00**	**48.67**	**48**
	44	**314.00**	**52.33**	**45**
Social	**45**	**415.00**	**69.17**	**23**
	46	**351.00**	**58.50**	**41**
	47	**376.00**	**62.67**	**36**
	48	**379.00**	**63.17**	**34**
	49	**464.00**	**77.33**	**8**
	50	**358.00**	**59.67**	**38**

Table (9): ANOVA Test for significant difference for strategy use according to UA

strategies	Source	Sum Square	DF.	Mean Square	F value	Sig. level
Memory	Between group	7.086	2	2.362	.105	.957
	Within group	2600.081	117	22.414		
	Total	2607.167	119			
Cognitive	Between group	126.197	2	42.066	.931	.428
	Within group	5239.769	117	45.170		
	Total	5365.967	119			
Compensation	Between group	3.542	2	1.181	.087	.967
	Within group	1570.383	117	13.538		
	Total	1573.925	119			
Metacognitive	Between group	322.318	2	107.439	3.050	.031
	Within group	4086.048	117	35.225		
	Total	4408.367	119			

Affective	Between group	41.338	2	13.779	.710	.548
	Within group	2251.829	117	19.412		
	Total	2293.167	119			
Social	Between group	80.528	2	26.843	1.261	.291
	Within group	2469.397	117	21.288		
	Total	2549.925	119			

Table (10): Scheffé's post-hoc test for Metacognitive strategies

University Average	**Mean**	**A & B**	**C**	**D**
A & B	29.13	-	-	0.05
C	33.62	-	-	-
D	36.11	-	-	-

Table (11): Strategies Ranking Order for Total Sample according to Learning Levels

strategies	Total sample		Year (1)		Year (2)		Year (3)		Year (4)	
	Weight Interval %	ranking	Weight Interval %	ranking	Weight Interval %	ranking	Weight Interval %	ranking	Weight Interval %	ranking
Memory	59.07	5	56.96	6	59.11	5	58.37	6	61.85	5
Cognitive	70.98	2	70.71	2	69.52	2	69.48	2	74.19	2
Compensation	68.25	3	67.67	3	65.89	3	69.11	3	70.33	3
Metacognitive	75.30	1	73.56	1	72.30	1	74.15	1	81.19	1
Affective	58.61	6	60.44	5	56.00	6	59.44	5	58.56	6
Social	65.08	4	63.44	4	62.22	4	67.56	4	67.11	4

Table (12): ANOVA Test for the Differences in Strategy Use according to Learning Level

strategies	Source	Sum Square	DF.	Mean Square	F value	Sig. level

Memory	Between group	76.967	3	25.656	1.176	.322
	Within group	2530.200	116	21.812		
	Total	2607.167	119			
Cognitive	Between group	216.967	3	72.322	1.629	.186
	Within group	5149.000	116	44.388		
	Total	5365.967	119			
Compensation	Between group	29.692	3	9.897	.743	.528
	Within group	1544.233	116	13.312		
	Total	1573.925	119			
Metacognitive	Between group	291.767	3	97.256	2.741	.046
	Within group	4116.600	116	35.488		
	Total	4408.367	119			
Affective	Between group	29.367	3	9.789	.502	.682
	Within group	2263.800	116	19.516		
	Total	2293.167	119			
Social	Between group	56.958	3	18.986	.883	.452

Table (13): Scheffé's Post-hoc test for strategies

Level					
Level	**Mean**	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**
(1)	33.10	-	-	-	-
(2)	32.53	-	-	-	-
(3)	33.37	-	-	-	-
(4)	36.53	-	-	-	-

Table (14): Means and Percentages of Strategy Groups for Self-efficacy

Strategies	Excellent		Very Good		Good		Poor	
	Mean	Per cent	Mean	Per cent	Mean	Per cent	Mean	Per cent
Memory	26.64	27.80	26.67	27.81	27.32	27.85	23.55	24.09
Cognitive	47.91	50.00	48.57	50.65	51.45	52.46	51.45	52.65
Compensation	21.27	22.20	20.65	21.54	19.32	19.69	22.73	23.26
Metacognitive	29.18	45.15	33.42	47.73	35.05	47.74	37.09	49.94
Affective	16.91	26.16	17.30	24.71	17.97	24.48	18.45	24.85
Social	18.5	28.69	19.30	27.56	20.3	27.78	18.73	25.21

Table (15): Results of (F) Test for the differences in strategy use according to Self-efficacy

Strategies	Source	Sum Square	DF.	Mean Square	F value	Sig. level
Memory	Between group	122.350	3	40.783	1.904	.133
	Within group	2484.817	116	21.421		
	Total	2607.167	119			
Cognitive	Between group	262.202	3	87.401	1.986	.120
	Within group	5103.764	116	43.998		
	Total	5365.967	119			
Compensation	Between group	115.701	3	38.567	3.068	.031
	Within group	1458.224	116	12.571		
	Total	1573.925	119			
Metacognitive	Between group	421.343	3	140.448	4.086	.008
	Within group	3987.024	116	34.371		
	Total	4408.367	119			
Affective	Between group	23.957	3	7.986	.408	.747
	Within group	2269.210	116	19.562		
	Total	2293.167	119			
Social	Between group	49.337	3	16.446	.763	.517
	Within group	2500.588	116	21.557		
	Total	2549.925	119			

Table (16): Scheffé's Post-hoc test for strategies

		Mean	Excellent	Very Good	Good	**Poor**
Compensation	Excellent	21.27	-	-	-	-
	Very Good	20.65	-	-	-	-
	Good	19.32	-	-	-	-
	Poor	22.73	-	-	-	-
Metacognitive	Excellent	29.18	-	-	0.05	0.05
	Very Good	33.42	-	-	-	-
	Good	35.05	-	-	-	-
	Poor	37.09	-	-	-	-