THE JOURNAL OF ASIA TEFL Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 103-129, Spring 2005

Iranian EFL Learners' Pattern of Language Learning Strategy Use

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This article reports the results of an investigation into Iranian EFL learners' perceived use of language learning strategies (LLSs) overall, the six strategy categories (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social) as well as the 50 individual strategies appearing in Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). Participants were 220 female and male English major university students who filled out the SILL. Results of the study showed that Iranian EFL learners were "medium" strategy users overall while with regard to strategy categories they used metacognitive strategies with a high frequency; cognitive, compensation, and affective strategies with a medium frequency, and memory and social strategies with a low frequency. With respect to individual strategies, two strategies—items 38 (metacognitive) and 42 (affective)—were used with the highest frequency and significantly different from a large number of other strategies; whereas items 6 (memory), 14 (cognitive), 19 (cognitive), 43 (affective), and 48 (social) were the least frequently used strategies and significantly different from a large number of other strategies.

Language learning strategies (LLSs) are defined by Oxford (1990, p. 8) as "operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval,

and use of information." Research on LLSs started with the studies of good language learners in the mid 1970s. Researchers were interested in determining what distinguished "good" from "poor" language learners and thereby characterizing the features of successful language learners (see, e.g. Rubin, 1975, Naiman et al., 1978). Since then, a large number of studies have focused on identifying the strategies employed by language learners to facilitate their learning.

Accordingly, comprehensive lists and inventories of strategies language learners use have been presented (c.f., O'Malley & Chamot, 1995; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991). The most recent and comprehensive inventory is that of Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). It consists of 50 strategies classified into six major categories, including memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social.

Memory strategies, like grouping, associating, or using imagery, "have a highly specific function: helping students store and retrieve new information" (Oxford, 1990, p 71); cognitive strategies, such as highlighting, analyzing, or summarizing messages, "enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means" (p.37); compensation strategies, like guessing or using synonyms, "allow learners to use the language despite their often large gaps in knowledge" (p.37); metacognitive strategies, like arranging, planning, and evaluating one's learning, allow learners to control their own cognition through planning, arranging, focusing, and evaluating their own learning; affective strategies like deep breathing and using checklists, help learners control their feelings, motivations, and attitudes related to language learning; and social strategies, like asking questions or cooperating with others, facilitate learning to learn with others in a discourse situation (Oxford, 1990).

Quite a large number of studies conducted in different contexts (EFL/ESL) and with different types of participants have used Oxford's framework to identify the overall frequency of strategy use among language learners. These studies, however, have shown different frequencies for the overall strategy use as well as the type and frequency of strategy categories used by learners

in EFL and ESL contexts. Several studies have shown that the cultural background and the nationality of language learners can be an effective factor in this regard (see, e.g., Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985).

Research on the frequency and type of LLSs in EFL contexts has mostly been conducted in South East Asia with specific cultural background of learners, which differentiate them from those of other Asian countries. This necessitates further research on LLSs in other EFL contexts including under-researched Asian countries. Findings of these studies will hopefully result in a more comprehensive understanding of LLSs.

Accordingly, the present study intended to examine Iranian EFL students' perception of the frequency of their overall strategy use as well as the strategy categories. In particular, the study sought answers to the following research questions:

1) What is the pattern of Iranian students' LLS use; overall and in terms of strategy categories.
2) Of the SILL 50 LLSs, which strategies are reported to be used most frequently and which ones are reported to be used least frequently by Iranian students?
3) In what way(s) is Iranian students' pattern of LLS use comparable to those of other Asian, particularly Southeast Asian, EFL learners?

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The first part of this section summarizes the results of the studies on overall strategy use as well as the strategy categories in EFL contexts. The majority of the studies cited below have used SILL as their instrument of data collection. Oxford (1990) suggests a mean of 2.4 and lower for "low", a mean range of 2.5 to 3.4 for "medium," and a mean range of 3.5 to 5 for "high" levels of strategy use. The studies reviewed here use the same scale in

classifying their participants.

Noguchi (1991) administered SILL to Japanese university students and showed that they were medium strategy users, overall, and used all strategy categories at low to medium levels. Among the strategy categories, memory and cognitive strategies were more popular than metacognitive and affective ones. Social strategies turned out to be the least frequently used category of strategies among this group of Japanese students. Chang (1991) also administered SILL to 50 Chinese students studying at the University of Georgia and found that they were medium strategy users. Compensation strategies were the most frequently used while affective ones were the least frequently used strategies among this group of Chinese students.

Green's (1991) preliminary study of 213 students at a Puerto Rican university showed that only one strategy category, metacognitive strategies, was used at a high level, while the other categories were used at a medium level with affective and memory categories being the least frequently used strategies. Overall, the participants of this study turned out to be medium strategy users. Oh (1992) conducted a study with 59 EFL students studying in a Korean university and found that they used overall strategies at a medium level. With respect to strategy categories, the only strategy category that was used at a high frequency was metacognitive; whereas compensation, affective, and social strategies were used at a medium level, and cognitive and memory strategies were used at a low level.

Another study investigating the strategy use of Korean students is Park (1997). In his study with Korean university students, he found that all strategy groups were used at a medium level. The highest frequency belonged to metacognitive strategies followed by compensation, memory, cognitive, social, and affective strategies. Ok (2003), too, investigated the strategy use of Korean secondary school students. He found that compensation strategies were used the most frequently (at a medium level), followed by social, cognitive, memory, metacognitive, and affective strategies (at a low level). Yang (1994) investigated the strategy use of 68 Taiwanese university students. All strategy categories were used at a medium level except for

compensation strategies which were slightly above the medium. The participants of the study were found to be medium strategy users.

Another study pertinent to the use of LLSs is Merrifield (1996). He examined the LLSs used by five adult learners. He found that these learners used LLSs at a medium level. The most frequently used strategy category was compensation while the least one was affective strategies, which were used at a low level. Bremner (1999) studying the strategy use of a group of Hong Kong university students showed that compensation and metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used, while affective and memory strategies were the least frequently used strategies. Overall, the participants of the study turned out to be moderate strategy users.

Another study concerning the use of LLSs was done by Wharton (2000). The participants of this study were 678 undergraduate bilingual students studying Japanese or French at a university in Singapore. He used an earlier version of SILL with 80 items. The mean of overall strategy use was reported to be medium. The highest frequency belonged to social strategies, whereas the lowest frequency belonged to affective strategies. Peacock and Ho (2003) studying the strategy use of 1006 Hong Kong university students, reported that the participants were medium strategy users with compensation category as the most frequently used strategies followed by cognitive and metacognitive strategies; then social, memory and affective strategies respectively.

Finally, Shamis (2003) studied the strategy use of Arab EFL English majors in Palestine. The results of his study showed that the participants were moderate strategy users with metacognitive strategies being the most and compensation strategies the least frequently used strategies.

The following table summarizes the results of the studies reviewed above to give a general picture of the pattern of LLSs use among EFL learners.

In sum, the results of the studies reviewed above, most of which were conducted in Asia and with EFL learners, can be summarized as follows. Firstly, the participants of the studies perceived themselves as medium strategy users. Second, metacognitive/compensation strategies were reported as the most frequently used strategies while affective/memory strategies as

TABLE 1
Summary of the Results of the Studies Investigating LLSs Use

Study	Nationality of participants	Level of LLSs use	The highest strategy category used	The lowest strategy category used
Noguchi, 1991	Japanese	Medium	Memory and cognitive	Social
Chang, 1991	Chinese	Medium	Compensation	Affective
Green, 1991	Puerto Rican	Medium	Metacognitive	Affective and memory
Oh, 1992	Korean	Medium	Metacognitive	Cognitive and memory
Yang, 1994	Taiwanese	Medium	Compensation	Other categories
Merrifield, 1996	French	Medium	Compensation	Affective
Park, 1997	Korean	Medium	Metacognitive	Affective
Bremner, 1999	Hong Kongers	Medium	Compensation	Affective
Wharton, 2000	Singapore	Medium	Social	Affective
Peacock and Ho, 2003	Hong Kongers	Medium	Compensation	Memory and Affective
OK, 2003	Korean	Medium	Compensation	Affective
Shamis, 2003	Palestinian	Medium	Metacognitive	Compensation

the least frequently used ones. It is the intention of the present study to see how another domain of EFL learners, namely, Iranians, perceive their pattern of strategy use given the fact that as Beauquis (2000, p. 55) stated "depending on their cultural backgrounds, learners may rely on certain strategies more than others." Bedell (1993 cited in Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995) also summarized the findings of a number of studies and showed that different cultural groups use particular types of strategies at different frequency levels.

With respect to "culture" in the above quotations, it is worth mentioning that mainly learners' styles and approaches to learning in general, and language learning in particular are intended. Thus, Singleton (1991) defines culture as follows:

> There are, in every society, unstated assumptions about people and how they learn, which act as a set of self-fulfilling prophecies that invisibly guide whatever educational process may occur there. They act as a kind of unintentional hidden curriculum, or what an anthropologist might call a

> cultural theory of learning. (p. 120)

Likewise, Hofstede (1986) describes differences in learning styles directly based on cultural needs and values. Oxford (1990), thus, believes that culture affects the development of overall learning style, and this, in turn, helps to determine the learners' choices of LLSs. It is, therefore, helpful to review briefly some of the studies that have attended to the general learning features of learners from Southeast Asian countries as well as Iran to help us develop a general picture of their cultural differences.

Watson-Raston (2002) studying the learning style of students from Southeast Asian countries such as Hong Kong, China, South Korea, and Japan, maintained that these students generally are used to being fed by their teachers all the necessary information. They do not show a high interest in studying in group and learning things in group. She believes that the nature of the Chinese ideographic or character-centered writing system that requires memorization and rote learning encourages repetition.

Another characteristically East Asian learning style is visual learning. In an investigation of sensory learning preferences, Reid (1987) found that Korean, Chinese and Japanese students are all visual learners, with Korean students ranking the strongest. They like to read and obtain a great deal of visual stimulation. For them, lectures, conversations, and oral directions without any visual backup are very confusing and can be anxiety-producing.

Still another East Asian preferred learning style is concrete-sequential. Students with such a learning style are likely to follow the teacher's guidelines to the letter, to be focused on the present, and demand full information. They prefer language learning materials and techniques that involve combinations of sound, movement, sight, and touch and that can be applied in a concrete, sequential, linear manner. Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) discovered that Chinese and Japanese are concrete-sequential learners, who use a variety of strategies such as memorization, planning, analysis, sequenced repetition, detailed outlines and lists, structured review and a search for perfection. Many Korean students also like following rules

(Harshbarger *et al.*, 1986), and this might be a sign of the concrete-sequential style.

Iranian students, on the other hand, although having some common approaches to learning as the Southeast Asian students, are described as culturally having some unique learning approaches. For instance, according to Naraghi Zadeh (2004), Iranian students combine all the learning orientations. It is embedded in the Iranian learning culture. This might be due to their specific philosophy of life indicating that a human being can only be perfect, when he studies all of the sciences and arts. This might also be due to the influence of the French educational system that Iran took over in the last century. In this system the students have to study all subjects. The results of her study also showed that the Iranian students are "assimilators" in the sense that they prefer to study more theory and they are more oriented towards reflective observation and an abstract formation of concepts. The reason for this orientation is the historical evolution of science in Iran, the lack of experimental learning processes, as well as Iran being a non-industrial country.

Rahimi, Riazi, and Saif (forthcoming) in a study concerning the relationship between the use of LLSs and various factors, including learning style, found that Iranian students are generally reflective (vs active), intuitive (vs sensing), verbal (vs visual), and global (vs sequential) learners. It would be interesting to find out how these learning features might relate to and affect students' use of language learning strategies. Though specific research is required to elaborate on this relationship, it would be possible to justify the use or nonuse of some of the LLSs by the EFL learners in light of these learning styles in the present study.

METHOD

Participants

The participants of the study were 220 Iranian university male (95) and

female (125) English major EFL students. Their age ranged from 19 to 25 years. Their mother tongue was Persian and they were studying English as a foreign language. Most of these students assume a position of a teacher to teach English as a foreign language at schools or private institutes after their graduation.

Instruments

The instrument used in this study was the 50-item Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (version 7, ESL/EFL student version) devised by Oxford (1990) (see the Appendix for a copy of the SILL). Self-report questionnaires, in spite of having some common problems, "can provide information from a large population, and the information can be compared and interpreted objectively through statistical data analysis" (Park, 1997, p. 212). Furthermore, as Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) assert, such techniques of data collection are easy and quick for administration, cost-effective, and nonthreatening.

As compared with other questionnaires of the same type (see, for example, Bialystok, 1981; Politzer, 1983; Chamot, *et al.*, 1987, etc), this inventory has been used in at least 40 to 50 major studies, including a large number of dissertations, involving about 10000 subjects. According to Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995), it has been extensively checked for reliability and validity indices and has been validated in multiple ways.

In the present study, the Persian translation of this instrument was used. The Persian translation of the questionnaire was developed and validated by Dehghan (2002). However, to further ensure the reliability of the inventory, after the data collection, it was administered to 30 subjects randomly selected from among the ones who had participated in the study, with a time interval of two weeks. The acquired test-retest reliability index was 0.78.

This inventory consists of six major categories each containing a number of items. The categories include: 1) Memory (nine items: 1-9); 2) Cognitive (14 items: 10-23); 3) Compensation (six items: 24-29); 4) Metacognitive

(nine items: 30-38); 5) Affective (six items: 39-44); and 6) Social (six items: 45-50). The choices were given numerical values that manifested the degree of the preference or tendency of the subjects towards the items of the questionnaire, on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("never or almost never true of me") to 5 ("always, or almost always true of me."). Students' performance on the questionnaires were coded and analyzed for the pattern of strategy use among this group of EFL learners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the descriptive statistics showed that the mean strategy use by the participants on the whole strategies was 3.44, indicating that they were medium strategy users. This finding of the study with respect to the overall mean of strategy use is consistent with the results obtained in other EFL contexts including Noguchi (1991) in Japan, Yang (1994) in Taiwan, Oh (1992) and Park (1997) in Korea, and Wharton (2000) in Singapore which all found that the EFL learners used strategies at a medium level. Table 2 presents the descriptives for strategy categories as used and reported by the participants of the study.

TABLE 2
Mean and SD of the Whole Strategy Use and the 6 Strategy Categories

Strategy Category	Mean	SD
Memory Strategies	3.12	0.68
Cognitive Strategies	3.37	0.59
Compensation Strategies	3.40	0.92
Metacognitive Strategies	3.72	0.78
Affective Strategies	3.41	0.69
Social Strategies	3.16	0.80
Overall strategy use	3.44	0.56

As it is evident in Table 2, except for the metacognitive strategies, which

showed a high mean (3.72), all other categories fell within a medium strategy use level. The next highly frequently used strategies, after metacognitive, were compensation and affective strategies. The means of the two were relatively the same (3.40 and 3.41, respectively). Then cognitive strategies with a mean of 3.37, followed by social and memory strategies with means of 3.16 and 3.12, respectively. In other EFL studies, too, metacognitive and compensation strategies were found to be among the most highly frequently used strategies and memory strategies, the least frequently used ones (see, for example, Wharton, 2002; Yang,1994; Oh, 1992; and Green, 1991, to name a few).

A repeated measure analysis of variance indicated that the difference among the means of the six strategy categories was significant ($F=34.7$, $p<0.05$). Follow-up tests using Bonferroni-corrected paired t-tests showed that the mean for metacognitive strategies (3.72) was significantly higher than the means of all other strategy categories. Similarly, the lowest mean belonging to memory strategies (3.12) showed significant difference with the mean of all other strategy groups, except for the social strategies.

In fact, the strategy categories, with respect to the mean differences can be put in four different levels. The first level contains just metacognitive strategies, which showed significant difference with all other strategy categories. The second level contains compensation, affective and cognitive strategies, which did not show any significant difference with each other but were used significantly more frequently than social and memory strategies. Finally, level three contains social and memory strategies. They both show significant difference with all other strategy categories (they were used significantly less frequently than other strategy categories) but they showed no significant difference with each other.

The reason why metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used ones by the Iranian EFL learners might be the fact that Iran is an EFL context and language learners do not have much exposure to the target language to pick it up unconsciously. In fact, due to the lack of enough exposure to the target language, they hardly have any chance to unconsciously pick up the

target language. Through conscious attention to language learning process, they can compensate for this deficiency, and that is why metacognitive strategies were used at such a high level. Furthermore, in most English classes, in schools, university, or even language institutes, a lot of emphasis is put on explaining about the language and making the learners conscious of the process of learning even in cases where the communicative approach is adopted.

The results for the individual strategies, too, confirm this interpretation. Among the 10 most frequently used strategies, five were metacognitive. Strategies such as, "I think about my progress in learning English," "I try to find out how to be a better and more effective learner of English," or "I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better" all show that the participants were conscious of the process of their learning and tried to have control over their learning. Interestingly enough, all these strategies were used at a high level.

The next three strategy categories most frequently used by the participants of this study were compensation, cognitive, and affective strategies. High use of compensation strategies usually characterizes the learners who struggle with lower competence. In fact, because of their lower levels of language competence, whenever the students produce or comprehend the target language, compensation strategies are used to enable them to go through language processes. Such a phenomenon is quite natural in an EFL context like Iran, where the learners do not have enough exposure to the target language and thus, they have to resort to their strategic competence to compensate for any linguistic deficiency.

With respect to the individual compensation strategies, such strategies as "I try to guess what the other person will say next in English," "To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses," and "When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures" were the most frequently used strategies, indicating what the learners reported they did while lacking enough knowledge to communicate. All the compensation strategies were used at a high to medium level.

Affective strategies, too, were found to be popular among the participants of this study. The frequency of their use was relatively as high as compensation strategies. These findings, nonetheless, contradict those of similar studies. For instance, Wharton (2000) reported that affective strategies were among the least frequently used strategies. The results also contradict those of Chang (1991), Noguchi (1991), Bremner (1999), Wharton (2000), and Peacock and Ho (2003). This difference might be due to the difference between the cultural background of the participants of the above-mentioned studies, mostly being East Asian students, and the Iranian students. That is, although both groups of students studied English in an EFL context and faced, more or less, the same type of problems learning English, they did not experience the same amount of emotional pressure while using the language. In other words, the high use of affective strategies by Iranian students might imply that they experienced more affective problems, and thus, used more affective strategies.

Indeed, affective strategies enable learners to control their emotions, attitudes, and motivations in language learning processes. Such situations usually occur when the leaner is supposed to give presentations or speak with a native speaker. A likely explanation for the high use of such strategies by the Iranian EFL learners is that in language classes they are usually supposed to give lectures and presentations. Giving a presentation in front of a group of classmates creates anxiety in the individual, let alone having to do it in a foreign language over which they do not have enough mastery. That might be the reason why they were so much concerned about and paid a lot of attention to affective factors. The frequency of the use of individual strategies justifies this explanation. Out of the six affective strategies, four were used at a high level. Using such strategies as “I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English” (4.08), “I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English” (3.76), or “I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake” are all indicative of the fact that the affective aspect of learning and using the language was very important for the subjects of the study and they paid a lot of attention to it.

Although numerically they were used less frequently than affective and

compensation strategies, cognitive strategies did not show significant difference with them. In other EFL studies, such as Wharton (2000), Bremner (1999), and Park (1997) cognitive strategies were reported to be among approximately at the middle of the hierarchy of strategy categories. Oxford (1990) suggests that cognitive strategies are essential in learning a new language because they operate directly on incoming information. Besides, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) consider cognitive strategies as the most popular strategies with language learners. In the current study, cognitive strategies appeared in the middle of the hierarchy of strategies and were used at a medium level. A quick review over the four cognitive strategies not used very frequently by the participants of this study may justify their low frequently use. These strategies were: "I look for words in my own language that are similar to the new word in English," "I start conversations in English," "I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English," "I say or write new English words several times."

The last two strategy categories in the hierarchy were social and memory strategies. They were significantly used less frequently than other strategy categories. These findings, too, are in line with the findings of the above mentioned studies. Social strategies involve interaction with other people (e.g., asking other people to slow down or to repeat what they said or asking for help or clarification), so they are very important in language use. It should be stated that these strategies are usually applicable to the situations where the learners have a lot of opportunity to use the language or have access to the native speakers. This can justify the scant use of these strategies.

With regard to the individual social strategies, two out of six (one third of the strategies) were among the least frequently ones, i.e., "I ask for help from English speakers" and "I try to learn about the culture of English speakers." The low use of these two strategies was quite expected as they characterize contexts where language learners have access to native speakers, not a context like Iran in that EFL learners do not have access to English native speakers. It was quite predictable that the participants of this study would not report a high use of these strategies as compared to other strategies.

The least frequently used strategy category was memory category. The results are consistent with those of Wharton (2000), and Oh (1992). Although Oxford (1990) regarded memory strategies as a powerful tool in language learning, the participants of the current study reported memory strategies as the least frequently used strategies. These findings contradict the stereotypical description of Asian learners in early studies in which Asian students were reported to prefer strategies involving rote memorization of language rules as apposed to more communicative strategies (e.g., Huang & Naerssen, 1987; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985).

The low frequency of using memory strategy might be due to the fact that traditional rote memorization strategies that Asian learners once were reported to have preferred might differ from the specific memory techniques reported in SILL. These techniques included making a mental picture of the situation in which the word might be used, using rhymes to remember new words, and grouping new words into synonyms, antonyms, nouns, and verbs. However, it is possible that the participants of the study were not familiar with these techniques in memory strategies. Hence, they reported using fewer memory strategies on the SILL. The two memory strategies that fall within the least frequently strategies, "I use flashcards to remember new English words" and "I physically act out new English words," provide the evidence for this justification.

Overall, the results of the present study are very much similar to other EFL studies, except that in most studies, affective strategies were the last or the last two strategy categories, while, in this study, affective strategies were among the most highly frequently used strategies. This finding confirms Oxford's (1989) idea about the importance of culture and national origin in strategy use. Given the fact that Iranian students have no or limited opportunity to practice their English outside the class with native speakers, they mostly resort to their innate feelings and emotions as a strong source in dealing with their language learning. Accordingly, affective strategies were reported to be used quite frequently as one of the strategy categories. This is not, however, the case in other EFL contexts including Southeast Asian countries where

EFL students have more chances of interacting with English native speakers. This point can also be supported by the fact that social strategies were reported to be used less frequently by Iranian students.

The results pertinent to individual strategies (see the Appendix, Table 1) reveal that the average of individual items ranged from a high of 4.08 (Strategy 42) to a low of 1.72 (Strategy 6). However, the results indicated that slightly more than 50% of the strategies had means falling in the medium level, while 46% of the means of strategy use fell in the high level, which was very close to the average percentage. Only, 2% of the strategies were used at a low level. The overall results were indicative of the fact that the participants of this study were medium to high strategy users.

In order to provide a more vivid picture of the individual strategies, the ten most and the ten least frequently used strategies were ranked. Table 3 and Table 4 show this ranking of the strategies.

TABLE 3
Ten Most Frequently Used Strategies

Rank	Mean	Strategy
1st	4.08	42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.
2nd	4.06	32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
3rd	4.04	38. I think about my progress in learning English.
4th	4.04	33. I try to find out how to be a better and more effective learner of English.
5th	3.85	31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.
6th	3.84	28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.
7th	3.79	30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.
8th	3.78	11. I try to talk like native English speakers.
9th	3.76	39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.
10th	3.75	1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.

TABLE 4
Ten least frequently used strategies

Rank	Mean	Strategy
41st	3.04	26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.
42nd	3.04	10. I say or write new English words several times.
43rd	3.02	50. I try to lean about the culture of English speakers.
44th	2.95	23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in
45th	2.83	7. I review English lessons often.
46th	2.75	14. I start conversations in English.
47th	2.66	48. I ask for help from English speakers.
48th	2.55	19. I look for words in my own language that ate similar to the new words in English
49th	2.25	43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary in English.
50th	1.72	6. I physically act out new English words.

As Table 3 shows, out of the 10 most frequently used strategies, five were metacognitive ones. This was in conformity with the ranking for the strategy categories, where metacognitive category had the highest mean. Strategies such as, "I pay attention when someone is speaking English," "I try to find out how to be a better leaner of English," and "I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me learn better" are all involved in the learners' thinking about their learning the target language and consciously planning their learning. Nonetheless, in this hierarchy, there is no instance of social strategies, which require the learners' involvement in using the language and cooperating with others. Such strategies, indeed, are not widely applicable to an EFL context like Iran.

Nevertheless, the presence of item one (I think of the relationship between what I already know and new things I learn in English), a memory strategy, in this list looks, to some extent, odd, because it belongs to the least frequently used strategy category. The high use of this strategy might be indicative of the participants' familiarity with some important approaches to learning. It might also be due to the instructors' emphasis on this particular

strategy.

On the other hand, among the ten least frequently used strategies, the highest number, four strategies, belong to cognitive strategies; social and memory strategies each have two items in this table. The presence of cognitive strategies in this list might be due to the nature of these four individual strategies. Three out of four strategies, i.e., "I look for words in my own language that are similar to the new word in English," "I start conversations in English," "I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English," characterize an ESL context where the learners are highly exposed to the English language and have a high opportunity to practice it.

On the other hand, two items in this list belonged to the highly frequently used categories; item 26 (I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English), a compensation strategy, and item 43 (I write down my feelings in a language learning diary in English), an affective strategy. The former shows the lack of productivity on the part of the learners in making new words. It could also show that the language learners are not so much involved in communicating in the English language so they do not encounter such problems as feeling a gap in vocabulary use. The latter, on the other hand, indicates that the Iranian learners do not practice writing enough and that is the reason why they do not use such an important writing task as writing diaries. Whatever the reason, the above discussion underlines the importance of paying attention to the individual items while studying LLSs use.

In order to see if the differences in the frequency of the use of individual strategies were significant an ANOVA test was run. The results are presented in Table 5. As the results show, the differences are significant ($F= 3.31$, $p<0.05$).

TABLE 5
ANOVA Results for the Difference between Means of the 50 Strategies

	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	2307.48	49	47.09	33.31	0.00
Within groups	15477.12		1.41		
Total	17884.61				

P<0.05

In order to further see where the difference lies, a Scheffé test was run. The results of this test showed that among the 50 strategies, strategies 6, 42, 43, 19, 48, 14, 38, and 32 showed significant differences (at $p<0.05$) with a large number of other strategies. Other strategies showed significant difference either with these strategies or with very few others.

A look at these strategies and comparing them with the ones appearing in Table 3 and Table 4 reveal that they belong to the most frequently and least frequently used strategies, having rather much higher and lower differences with other strategies. Among these seven strategies, items 38, "I think about my progress in learning English" and 42, "I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English," the first belonging to the metacognitive category and the second to the affective one, were among the most frequently used strategies and showed significant difference with a large number of strategies. In fact, these two strategies were the most popular strategies among the participants of the study. They both show the learners' conscious attention to the learning process and the affective consideration, which are typical of an EFL context. These two strategies, however, are different from those reported by Peacock and Ho (2003). They found strategies 24 (To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses) and strategy 29 (If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing), both compensation strategies, as the most frequently used ones.

The remaining five strategies, that is, "I physically act out new English words" (memory), "In English class, I start conversations in English" (cognitive) "I look for similarities and contrasts between English and Persian" (cognitive) "I write down my feelings in a language learning diary" (affective) and "I ask for help from English speakers" (social) can be called the least favorite strategies among the participants of this study. Interestingly, three out of these five strategies belong to two relatively highly used categories, i.e. cognitive and affective strategies. This underlines the importance of paying attention to individual strategies in addition to the overall strategy and strategy category use. Although the two categories were used at a medium

level and showed a medium frequency of use among other categories, these individual strategies were used at a low level.

The reason for a relatively low use of the affective strategy might be due to the fact that it involves writing and this skill is not very much practiced in language classes in Iran. In addition, as the language class size in Iran is rather high, the teachers who assign writing tasks to the students rarely have enough time to correct the writings, so the students, being aware of the fact that their writings are not usually corrected, are not so enthusiastic to write in English.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The results of the present study showed that Iranian EFL learners were medium strategy users. However, one strategy category, i.e., metacognitive category, was used at a high frequency as the most frequently used strategy category. Memory and social strategies were used as the least frequently used categories by the participants of the study. The results related to strategy category use approximately resemble those of other similar studies conducted with Asian students. However, for one strategy category, the results were different. Unlike most other studies, affective strategies were among the most frequently used strategies. This might be due to the difference between the cultural background and the national origin of East Asian students and the Iranian students as discussed before. One interesting finding of the present study was that no significant difference was observed among the affective, compensation, and cognitive strategies. The implication of this finding is that either the nature of the strategies included in these categories is not very different (they might not be mutually exclusive) or that they were not able to capture what they intended to in terms of learners' behaviors and actions.

With respect to individual strategies, strategies 38 (I think about my progress in learning English) and 42 (I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English) were the highest frequently used strategies

showing significant difference with a large number of other strategies. On the other hand, strategies 6 (I physically act out new English words), 14 (In English class, I start conversations in English), 19 (I look for similarities and contrasts between English and Persian), 43 (I write down my feelings in a language learning diary), and 48 (I ask for help from English speakers) were the least frequently used strategies showing significant difference with a large number of other strategies.

The findings of the study pertinent to individual strategies indicated that there was not a complete conformity between the frequency of strategy category use and the use of individual strategies. In some cases some individual items belonging to a more highly frequently used category were used with a lower frequency and vice versa. This implies that in studying strategy use of language learners not only should we attend to overall strategy use and strategy categories; we should also pay attention to the learners' individual strategy use.

Due to various factors such as improper teaching, lack of enough exposure to English, and the cultural background of the Iranian learners, some important strategy categories, i.e. social, and memory strategies were not reported to be used as frequently as others. Thus, English instructors may put more emphasis on these strategies by making the language learners aware of them and providing appropriate situations and activities in language classes so that the learners use these rather neglected strategies.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite the informing findings, the present study has some limitations. The first, however, relates to the instrument of the study, SILL. As Table 1 and the findings of the present study reveal, in almost all the studies learners report to be moderate strategy users. Given the fact that SILL uses Likert scale, it is likely that there is an underlying “regression toward mean” effect in using this strategy inventory which might affect its validity. We, therefore,

suggest other researchers use other instruments to find out if they come across the same results. The second limitation of the study relates to the fact that we did not consider language proficiency of the participants as a variable. There would certainly be a relationship between students' level of language proficiency and their reported use of language learning strategies.

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APPENDIX
Mean and SD of the Individual Strategies Used by the Participants

Strategy	Mean	SD
1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	3.75	0.98
2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	3.28	1.08
3. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of situation in which the word might be used.	3.18	1.23
4. I use rhymes to remember new English words (e.g., I see a “cat” on a “mat”).	3.30	1.10
5. I use flashcards to remember new English words.	3.15	1.22
6. I physically act out new English words (e.g., when I learn new word ‘headache’, I act like I have a headache).	1.72	0.93
7. I review English lessons often.	2.83	1.20
8. I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	3.22	1.06
9. I memorize new English words by grouping them into synonyms, antonyms, nouns, and verbs.	3.68	0.92
10. I say or write new English words several times.	3.04	1.11
11. I try to talk like native English speakers.	3.78	1.02
12. I practice the sounds of English.	3.40	1.13
13. I use the English words I know in different ways.	3.54	1.17
14. In English class, I start conversations in English.	2.57	1.18
15. I watch TV shows and movies spoken in English or listen to English radio programs.	3.70	1.14
16. I read for pleasure in English.	3.50	1.10
17. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English partially.	3.65	1.24
18. I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	3.40	1.12
19. I look for similarities and contrasts between English and Persian.	2.55	1.15
20. I try to find patterns in English.	3.75	1.03
21. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	3.39	1.06

22. I try not to translate word-for-word.	3.74	1.10
23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	2.95	1.12
24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	3.67	1.04
25. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	3.45	1.15
26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	3.04	1.35
27. I read English without looking up every new word.	3.23	1.31
28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	3.84	1.06
29. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	3.16	1.35
30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	3.75	1.10
31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	3.88	1.02
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	4.06	0.92
33. I try to find out how to be a better and more effective learner of English.	4.04	0.95
34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	3.34	1.00
35. I look for people I can talk to in English.	3.50	1.11
36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	3.40	1.10
37. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	3.50	1.08
38. I think about my progress in learning English.	4.04	1.02
39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	3.76	1.24
40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	3.57	1.30
41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	3.58	1.16
42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	4.08	0.96
43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	2.25	0.98
44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	3.25	1.14

45. If I don't understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	3.64	1.21
46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	3.19	1.28
47. I practice English with other students.	3.07	1.28
48. I ask for help from English speakers.	2.66	1.17
49. I ask questions for clarification in English.	3.38	1.12
50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3.02	1.00