

## Korean Students' Language Learning Strategies and Years of Studying English as Predictors of Proficiency in English

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TESOL Journal  
Vol. 2, pp. 39-61  
©2010  
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### Abstract

This study predicted the English proficiency of Korean students using the components of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and number of months spent in the formal study of English. There were 302 Korean students, ages 14-18, who were requested to answer the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and an English ability test. The SILL includes strategies on memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. An English Ability Test was used to measure skills on using grammar, increasing vocabulary, detecting grammatical errors, and reading comprehension. The multiple regression was used to analyze whether the SILL subscales and months spent in the formal study of English can significantly predict English proficiency. Only the compensation strategy and months spent in the formal study of English significantly predicted English ability. There was an increase in R (.35) when the months spent in the formal study of English were added with the SILL as predictors of English proficiency.

**Keywords:** Language Learning Strategies, English proficiency

### Introduction

English has become a principal asset in our world today. A study conducted by Pew Research Center showed that 66,000 people from 50 countries have said there is now a global consensus on the need to learn English (Mujica, 2003). According to Power (2005), "there are 350 million people in Asia alone who speak English as a foreign language. This figure is continuously increasing to the point that the ratio of non-native speakers of English as compared to the native speakers is three to one—clearly, the native speakers are being outnumbered by learners of English today" (p. 46). In a report by the South Korea tourist destination (2008), "there are not enough schools to meet the rising demand of middle class families for this English instruction" (p. 1). As a result, 29,511 children had left South Korea to study abroad in their elementary and high school days.

Learning a foreign language effectively means using adequate learning strategies (Meschyan & Hernandez, 2002). These language learning strategies are used in order to gain proficiency in English specifically among English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners. Proficiency is the ultimate goal of all language learning efforts (Nisbet, Tindall, & Arroyo, 2005). There are several studies that have been

consistent in their claims that language learning strategy and English proficiency are related (Liu, 2004). The pattern of strategy use has been significantly related to English proficiency (Nisbet, Tindall, & Arroyo, 2005). Studies show that more strategies are used; the more likely English proficiency will increase. This indicates that learners with low proficiency use insufficient strategies (Liu, 2004). Oxford (1990) and McLaughlin (1987) emphasized that language performance was measured in many different ways: self-ratings of proficiency (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989), language proficiency and achievement tests (Lett & O'Mara, 1990; Oxford, Park-Oh, Ito, & Sumrall, 1993; Phillips, 1991; Wen & Johnson, 1991), entrance and placement examinations (Mullins, 1992), language course grades (Mullins, 1992), years of language study (Watanabe, 1990), and career status reflecting expertise in language learning (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989). Generally, language performance also refers to language proficiency (performance related to general standard of competence but not related to a specific curriculum), language achievement (performance linked to a specific curriculum), and language task behaviors (performance on specific language tasks) (Lan & Oxford, 2003). In fact, the proportion of the variance of English proficiency was supported and explained by the use of SILL strategies - having 51%, 58%, 53% and 40%. These variances, when taken together, show that there is a consistent positive relationship, from moderate to strong, between SILL and English proficiency. In most of these studies, although not in every circumstance, the relationship is linear (Oxford, 1996). It only shows that more advanced or more proficient students use strategies with increased frequency. With this rationale, the present study tested whether or not the use of language learning strategies predict English ability.

However, in learning EFL, strategies are not the only consideration in increasing proficiency. The time spent in studying formal English is a very important factor. However, the necessary length of time devoted to learning English has not been established yet based on studies. There is no specific number of months or years spent learning the English language to increase proficiency. Although some articles indicate that many people can already function well after studying English for a year or two, it does not mean that the learner has already acquired proficiency (Ward, 1998). Even though a learner may seem fluent in a language socially, he or she may experience difficulty with the language academically (Lake & Pappamihel, 2003). Generally, it takes five to eight years of formal English studies to acquire proficiency (Lake & Pappamihel, 2003). Research suggests that learners who speak English from scratch need about five to 10 years in school and how literate they are in their native language before they can do well in English (Ward, 1998). The present study used the months of formal study of English together with language learning strategies as predictors of English ability among Korean students studying English in the Philippines.

The present study used the factors of memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social as language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990). These six strategies are important in language learning but the researchers have yet to identify which combinations are really critically important, effective and/or utilized by most of the Koreans in acquiring English proficiency. In addition, the structure of these factors is also investigated together with the number of months of learning formal English to predict English proficiency of Korean learners in the

Philippines. An English ability test and Oxford's SILL Korean version were used for this purpose.

### **English as a Foreign Language for Koreans**

In a country like Korea, English programs are extremely expensive because there are few Koreans who speak English in the country. On one hand, most Korean children study English in public schools from third grade onwards, but English is taught by Korean-born instructors, and they mostly teach simple vocabularies only. If that is the case, there is little chance for the students to actually use English in conversations (Why would I want to teach in Korea, 2003). On the other hand, Filipinos started learning English as early as Kindergarten. This is the medium of instruction for almost 10 years and it results in nearly two generations of educated adolescents and young adults speaking fluent English (Randolph, 2007).

English for Koreans is learned as a foreign language (EFL) because they are learning English from a country whose L1 is not English but the teachers are definitely competitive and accurate with the English language. Here are some reasons why Koreans prefer learning EFL in the Philippines. First, English is widely spoken in the country as 93.5% of Filipinos can speak and understand the language very well because it is used as the business language and a medium of instruction in schools. Second, the Philippines offer the same quality of English education (when compared to other English speaking countries) at a lower cost. Lastly, the rich natural and cultural resources of the country attract visitors (Philippines ESL Tour Program, 2008).

In addition, the high school and college entrance exams which measure (among other things) English proficiency is one of the reasons why Koreans study English. It was reported that a student who does poorly in the high school test given will never be able to get into a top university for graduating Koreans (Why would I want to teach in Korea, 2003).

### **Oxford's Framework**

The researcher chose to focus on Oxford's framework because according to Jones (1998) Oxford's framework has developed a system of language learning strategies which is more comprehensive and detailed compared to other models—where most of the factors are overlapping. In fact Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was used to determine the learning strategies of more than 8,000 students all over the world now. It is the “most comprehensive classification of learning strategies” according to Ellis (1994, p.539). SILL is a list of strategies according to Oxford's six categories and it is the most widely used inventory because it allows comparison for the study (Bremner, 1999).

In Oxford's framework, she divided her six factors into two. The two sets of taxonomy on language learning strategies are classified as direct and indirect learning strategies.

Direct learning strategies entail a mental process of receiving, retaining, storing, and retrieving the words or other aspects of the target language. Whereas in

indirect learning strategies, it is more on organization of learning through activities that facilitate the learner in regulating thoughts and feelings (Rausch, 2000).

The first type of taxonomy, the direct learning strategies emphasizes memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. It “involves direct learning and use of the subject matter, in this case a new language” (Oxford, 1990, pg. 11-12). The memory strategies are more focused on the memorization of words or word recall while the cognitive strategy are the mental strategy learners use to make sense of their learning. Memory strategies are those used for storage of information (Hismanoglu, 2000). It is said that insensitive use of memory strategies by EFL learners may indicate that it is a cultural habit because just like the Australian students, they revealed that remembering difficult words was not effective as opposed to Indonesians who confessed that they have a habit of rote learning behavior (Lengkanawati, 2004). This specific strategy is useful for quickly learning vocabularies—which is important especially in the beginning and intermediate stages of language learning but not necessarily later (Oxford, Cho, Leung, & Kim, 2004). Compensation strategies help learners to overcome knowledge gaps to continue the communication by switching to the mother tongue, using other clues, getting help and using a synonym (Hismanoglu, 2000; Shamis, 2002). It deals with the mind or the cognitive aspect of the individual. Cognitive strategies are more direct in manipulation of the learning material. Repetition is the key to achieve successes in learning a language and actions such as translation, note taking, key words and the like are encouraged in order to achieve this factor (O'Malley, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, & Küpper, 1985). Compensation strategies include behaviors such as guessing intelligently and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing (Hismanoglu, 2000). Yang's study (2007) stated that compensation strategies are the most frequent strategies Chinese learners use because they allow a great opportunity to guess the meaning despite of having limited grammatical and vocabulary knowledge.

The second type of taxonomy is the indirect learning strategies which include metacognitive, affective and social strategies (Hismanaoglu, 2000). Indirect strategies “contribute indirectly but powerfully to learning” (Oxford, 1990, pg. 11-12). The metacognitive strategy is applying skills in organizing plans, monitoring one's production or simply self-monitoring (O'Malley et al., 1985). Metacognitive strategies analyze one's mistake and not trying to make the same mistake again in the future that's why metacognitive strategies are developmental in nature. The findings of Liu's study (2004) revealed that when metacognition is highly used, it can provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process by planning, constant monitoring and evaluating (Oxford 1990, p.136). It implies that seeking opportunities keeps the EFL learners on track of their learning which is considered crucial given the poor environment such as the Philippines (Liu, 2004). Next would be the affective strategy. Affective strategies are concerned with the learner's emotional requirements such as confidence. Stern (1992) stated in his study that “good language learners are more or less conscious of these emotional problems” (pg. 266). In this case, it is believed that emotions can affect one's learning too (Hismanoglu, 2000). In learning a foreign language there are some instances whereby a learner may feel negative emotions along the way. A study revealed that the affect part of a learner can hinder or slow down learning process, for instance

anxiety (Ariza, 2002). This emotion creates discomfort and fear—fear of committing mistakes or fear of socializing with others is one of the examples of anxiety. In addition, Oxford (1990) emphasized that it is possible that learners are not familiar with paying attention to their own feeling. But it is noteworthy that this strategy is helpful when learners are anxious or is in need for a motivational boost therefore, high-proficiency learners may not require these strategies very much (Oxford, Cho, Leung, & Kim, 2004). The last factor for the indirect strategies would be the social strategies. As the word implies, social strategies deal with the people surrounding the learner and the environment as well. Social strategies lead to increased interaction with the target language (Hismanoglu, 2000). Social strategies are “activities which give them opportunities to be exposed to and practice their knowledge” as described by Wenden and Rubin’s study (1987, p. 23-27).

For the past years, there had been numerous research studies regarding the relationship of language learning strategies and proficiency. Proficiency is pertaining to an individual’s competency or ability in using a specific language, regardless of the situation in which it has been acquired (Bachman, 1990). In unfolding the description of language learning strategies, it can be known as a set of strategies, approaches, and behaviors or for its objective in acquisition of knowledge, production of effective learning, regulation of learning. Descriptions may vary but to put it in simpler terms, it can be clearly defined as what individuals do to aid them in their learning process (Bremner, 1999).

Since the 1970s, there have been several research investigation on language learning strategies. With this, it helped in understanding how a learner uses the skills in acquiring foreign languages (Ok, 2003). According to Reiss (1985), the trend in language learning strategies shifted from teachers to learners because educational researchers realized that what’s more important is to understand the learner rather than the teacher. Learning a foreign language involves different learning strategies that are needed in order to master the language and eventually benefit from it. However, teaching a foreign language still faces so many problems and challenges specifically in terms of the learning methods (Lengkanawati, 2004).

Various researchers have agreed that the effective language learners have conscious usage of language learning strategies (Naiman, Frohlich & Todesco, 1975; Oxford, 1985; Wenden, 1985). In Liu’s (2004) study, it revealed that the higher a learner’s English proficiency, the more they use different combinations of learning strategies. On the other hand, the lower the learner’s English proficiency, the lesser they use a strategy. The findings were consistent with other Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) researches such as Yu (2003) and Dreyer and Oxford (1996). In addition, in most of the findings of other researchers, they have found out that a successful language learner in general use more and better language learning strategies than those who are poor learners (Oxford, 1989; 1993). Some studies mentioned that the reason behind this is because of factors like age, gender, personality, motivation, self-concept, life-experience, learning style, excitement, and anxiety—all of these affect the way in which language learners learn a specific language (Hismanoglu, 2000).

Age as a factor was shown by several studies which claimed that young learners tend to use social strategies like discussing and asking help from others (Lee & Oxford, 2008). In contrast, an adult learner uses metacognition strategies

such as planning, organizing, and evaluating one's own learning (Lee & Oxford, 2008). Moreover, motivation influences the choice of strategies because according to Oxford (1990), more motivated students tend to use more strategies than less motivated students. In acquiring EFL, the learner's belief, which is defined as "psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (Richardson, 1996, p.102), greatly influences the learner's attitudes and his/her level of motivation in the acquisition of an EFL. Accordingly, they affect the progress of language acquisition and lessen the time spent devoted to language learning (Bernat, 2006). Finally, the cultural background on the other hand is influential too because rote memorization and other forms of memorization were found to be more prevalent to Asian students as compared to other cultural backgrounds. This is just one aspect that can affect the kind of strategy used when cultural background is considered.

Oxford (1990) emphasized that "Nationality or ethnicity influences strategy use" (1990, p.13). The importance of further research in different learning environments is to search for more consistent information within and across group of learners (Oxford, 1993, pg. 183). Although China already started exploring the topic in the mid 1980s and the rest of the world in the mid 1990s, there is still a need to further explore because the findings make it difficult to apply and understand for every context or learning environment (Liu, 2004). With this finding, one may say that for every culture, there is an effective way of learning a foreign language specifically for them alone (or it may be shared by other cultures as well).

Here are some findings from various research investigations that explored language learning from different context and then related it to English proficiency. In Bremner's (1999) study he included participants from Hong Kong who are English majors. He used SILL to explore the strategies that Chinese students utilized, and used self-report of students' English speaking and listening tests scores to measure their English proficiency. He revealed that out of the 50 specific strategies, 11 were significantly correlated to proficiency while Hoang (1999) found more proficient learners if these learners use more strategies effectively. The implications of not using all kinds of strategies in acquiring English is because as said in the study of Green and Oxford (1997) and Bremner (1999), only eight of the various strategies had a significant association to proficiency level in both of their studies. In this study, only six of the eight most common strategies were widely used among Korean students, specifically memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognition, affective and social strategies.

On the other hand, Halbach's study (2000) revealed that learners who got higher scores in their final exam frequently use different strategies. This was verified by analyzing 12 diaries of the participants which included their use of learning strategies and their high scores in exams. In the study of Shmais (2003), English majors in a Palestine University had significant memory strategy use in order to learn a foreign language. Various studies showed the preferred usage of compensation strategies among Korean students learning the English language, such as in Kim's study (1995), Lee's study (2002) and Grainger's study (1997). The preference of Korean EFL learners of using compensation strategies may be due to their need of coping with the diverse situations of communication and interaction

with their classmates and teachers in class. Applying compensation strategies in their language learning enables them to make up for their missing knowledge in the English language. It also reveals the effort exerted by learners in overcoming the limitations they encounter in speaking and writing (Ok, 2003).

In contrast, the compensation strategy is the lowest because it is said that some individual strategies could be attributed to culture and educational system (Shamis, 2002). In Palestine, the students have limited opportunities to use functional practice strategies especially in large classes because they are more concerned with passing exams and answering questions that are directly related to their prescribed textbooks (Shamis, 2002). As a result, the students were reluctant to use compensation strategies because they did not use gestures when they had difficulty producing the language and did not make up new words when they do not know the right ones (Shamis, 2002). In spite of these diverse studies, there are still several research findings that establish a different assumption on the relationship of learning strategies and language proficiency (Liu, 2004).

The major findings for Asian learners in Oh's study (1992) on Korean students, Yang's study (1993) on Chinese students and Yang's study (2007) on Taiwanese junior college students, used SILL which revealed that memory is the least used strategy in acquiring proficiency for L2 which was measured using the mid-term exam scores in English reading and listening of the students (Yang, 2007). The reason explained by Lee and Oxford (2008) about the major findings for Asian learners is that the items for memory strategy in the SILL are focused on vocabulary, without inclusion of rote memory and repetition, which are the basic foundation of successful memorization of Asian students. The construction of memory items in the SILL includes a range of memory strategies based on visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities alone and this might not be applicable to Korean students or other learners in Asia (Lee & Oxford, 2008).

In language learning one might observe that studies have different results, however, researchers in this field are unanimous in identifying the distinction between poor learners and learners who excel in learning EFL. To support this notion, a study by Ok (2003) pointed out three reasons: First, learners cannot really describe or know their strategies. Second, some learners use fewer strategies than more successful learners, and these strategies are less effective—usually involve non-communicative strategies like translation, rote memorization, and repetition (Nyikos 1987). Lastly, there are many ineffective language learners even though they are aware of their strategies and use most of it simply because these learners lack the skill to apply the strategies and they are not so careful in executing them (Vann & Abraham 1990). But according to Lee (2002), the reason why there are poor learners and high achievers is because students who held the highest regard for education as an essential for social mobility resulted in superior academic achievement as compared to students who did not take school as the key to success.

Whereas, Rubin (1975) suggested that a good language learner is willing to guess intelligently, willing to communicate with others, takes advantage of any opportunities, monitors his or her performance and most of all, pays attention to the meanings. For Naiman et al. (1975), a good language learner should be able to identify the language situation, be able to participate well, use the language to

communicate and be able to address the demands when it comes to the affective aspects of it.

Learning the distinctions between poor and excellent learners leads us to question what the specific strategies really mean because language strategies are broadly defined by many researchers across time. Furthermore, it is evident that there are differences in terms of preference of language learning strategy. Palestinian EFL learners used the memory strategy the most. However in other Asian studies, it revealed that memory strategy is the least used strategy among the SILL factors. Korean EFL learners are found to utilize compensation strategy the most compared to the other five strategies. The variation of strategy use is not solely based on learner's preference but also the age, gender, educational system found in a specific context, kinds of tests or probably a cultural habit can influence the strategy use as well. There are numerous EFL variables that are not constant but one factor that is not divergent across learners is the time spent in studying English, which will be further investigated in the current study.

In Oxford's framework, she was able to distinguish one factor from another but the time spent in learning the English language is not included. This is the reason why the researchers included the number of months or years in learning English in a formal education as a factor for this study. Because acquiring a new language may vary depending on the exposure to formal education. In this study, the number of months or years will also serve as predictor for English proficiency.

### **The Number of Months Spent in Studying Formal English**

There are now over 200 different Korean businesses around the metro, among these establishments include language training centers, on-line gaming firms, supermarkets and restaurants (Vargas, 2007). But the majority of it is the language training centers where Koreans enroll in short term programs or schools that accept international students where they undergo formal schooling.

Formal study of English is defined as structured educational system by the government for individuals. It is also a system that trains and develops individuals' knowledge, abilities, intellect and character (What is formal education, 1996). Formal study involves students in a classroom with proper guidance by trained teachers or educators (Enhancing Education, 2002). Enrolling in a formal education is very important in learning EFL especially in the Philippines because this country is not an English speaking country. The interaction is not sufficient in order to acquire proficiency. It needs some input by English teachers to know the different rules in grammar and even the pronunciation.

Now, the debate on how long an EFL learner may take in acquiring proficiency is still on. Many people still believe that there is no specific parameter in learning a new language because it will solely depend on the person (Shoebottom, 1996).

Learners should have at least three years of time in speaking English as their foreign language to develop their oral skills in the English language (McLaughlin, 1992). However, having three years of spending time in speaking English as foreign language (EFL), does not necessarily mean that the student will be as skilled as the people who use the English language as their mother tongue (Shoebottom, 1996).



Other people have these misconceptions that after six years of English language instruction; Korean students should be able to communicate orally at a basic phase using English as a medium (Kim & Margolis, 2003). Researchers in foreign language projected that it will take as long as five to seven years time for a learner to acquire the level of proficiency in understanding the second language in its instructional uses (Collier, 1989; Cummins, 1981). Some learners may learn faster, while some a bit slower.

In addition, the academic-related aspect in developing EFL takes five years to develop while the communication skills can be developed first and rapidly. Similarly, according to Collier (1989) and Cummins (1981) said that it takes about two years to acquire conversational skills and four to nine years to acquire the academic language skills.

The attention of human is limited, thus, no one can acquire knowledge for hours or weeks but some people learn quickly than others—this is because language learning is a serious commitment as McLaughlin (1992) have described. Researchers said that one may expect that the more learners hear and use the language, the quicker their English language skills develop, however evidence indicate that this is not always the case (McLaughlin, 1992).

The study of Kim and Margolis (2003) showed that the average Korean students receive an average of 80 hours of English listening and speaking instruction. The authors also concluded that Korean students have approximately 210 hours of English listening and speaking instruction in their own lifetime. Furthermore, the 210 lifetime hours is divided into the processing of the language reception and production. The result showed that each student could afford at least five to three hours of opportunity for English speech production on a one on one basis with their respective English instructors.

In relation to this, the development of one's native language indicates that the students can transfer their native language and literacy skills in acquiring EFL—thus it will help shortening the amount of time needed to obtain the level of proficiency (Baker & de Kanter, 1981; Cummins, 1994). Lastly, studies show that students develop social language known as basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) through interaction with peers (either in formal or informal setting) is important for academic success but it is acquired over a period of one or two years. While the cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) can take five to eight years to fully acquire, this is the type of proficiency that the current study aims to explore (Lake & Pappamihel, 2003).

### **Language Acquisition, Formal Education, and Learning Strategy**

There are five main hypotheses on Krashen's theory of foreign language acquisition. In the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis, language acquisition is defined as a subconscious process similar to what learners go through in their first language acquisition. Learners focus on the usage of the target language and not on the grammatical and vocabulary rules of the language. Language learning involves learner's conscious awareness on the foreign language, thus, being familiar with language rules. In the Natural Order hypothesis, EFL/E2L learners are aware of the grammatical structures of the new language since they have been exposed to these

structures in learning their L1. In the Monitor hypothesis, the learner has a “conscious editor” called monitor which enables them to concentrate on the rules and form of the target language (i.e. during grammar test, essay composition). In the Input hypothesis, it discusses how learners acquire and develop language competency over time. A formula of “i+1” is used to represent this hypothesis. The “i” refers to the stage where the learner is and “i+1” refers to the level of acquisition that occurs (Schütz, 2007). In the Affective Filter hypothesis, emotions (motivated, confident, anxious) play a vital role in language acquisition and in promoting or demoting comprehension of input.

In terms of the relationship between language acquisition and formal English education, classroom learning is important since it enables EFL learners to communicate with language teachers who provide them comprehensible input from the target language. It also engages them in communicating and learning with individuals who are more knowledgeable in their target language. Several studies have been investigating on a learner’s language competence and exposure to classroom teaching, age of learner, and language acquisition. The results of the said studies were found to be consistent with the five language acquisition hypothesis. Various studies on language learning strongly recommend learners to use a variety of learning strategies since these strategies facilitate language acquisition (Rigney 1978). Good language learners and their learning strategies can be considered to be potentially beneficial in the enhancement of their language acquisition skills (O’Malley, 1985).

In this study, the researchers want to assess Korean students’ foreign language learning strategies and their English proficiency with the use of Rebecca Oxford’s Language Learning Strategies as a framework. This will determine what specific learning strategies would be effective and are commonly used by Korean students—hoping to help the Korean community in the Philippines in learning EFL. Lastly, the researchers opted to include the number of months spent in learning formal English as a predictor of English proficiency as well.

With this in mind the current study would like to answer these research questions:

1. Will the language learning strategies significantly contribute in increasing Korean students’ English proficiency?
2. Does number of months learning formal English increase the English proficiency of Korean students?
3. Will the overall relationship of the language learning strategies and English proficiency increase when length of formal study of English is added as a predictor of English proficiency?

The researcher hypothesized that the language learning strategies can increase Korean students’ English Proficiency. Next, the number of months learning formal English increases as the English proficiency of Korean students also increases. Also, the more predictors of SILL and the longer a student learns English in a formal education increases English proficiency. Finally, the overall relationship of the language learning strategies and English proficiency will increase if the length of formal English study will be added as a predictor of English proficiency.

## Method

### Participants

The participants in the study were composed of 302 Korean students studying in the Philippines from ages 14 to 18 years old and they should be either in Grade six, High School or in College level of education. The nature of the test and its difficulty level are more appropriate with the specified age group. The participants were from schools in Metro Manila such as Marymount School, Southville International School and colleges, namely, International Christian Academy, Far Eastern University-Fern College, and De La Salle University.

The study used purposive sampling technique because the schools are not exclusive for Korean students. Most of the participants that were chosen by an English Language Coordinator were already part of the school's English Language Learning (ELL) program. Their mother tongue (L1) is Korean and their foreign language (L2) is English. The selected participants have agreed to participate in the study. By confirming if the participant's L1 and L2 can be considered as a participant for the current study, the researchers included this question in the demographics part of the questionnaire. Lastly, the participants should have studied or is currently studying English in a formal education setting—it can be in an English language center or in schools as long as the medium of instruction is in English. These criteria were determined through preliminary questions in the instruments.

### Instruments

The study used two instruments, the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford and the English Ability Test. Since the SILL is an existing test that is most commonly used by researchers, the current study also used the test to determine the language learning of Korean students. It has been used worldwide for students of second and foreign languages in settings such as university, school, and government. The factors are memory, compensation, metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social strategies. The reliability of the SILL version 7.0 is .99 based on independent raters (Oxford, 1986; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). The internal consistency reliability of the SILL is .94 based on a 505-person sample (Yang, 1992) and .92 based on a 315 Chinese participants (Watanabe, 1990). But the Chronbach's alpha of the SILL as reported by Green and Oxford (1995) is .93 to .98 depending whether the SILL is in the learner's own language or in L2. Oxford (1990) reported high validity of the instrument based on numerous studies which the SILL has found to have a significant relationship with language performance as indicated by grades, scores on other tests, self-ratings and teacher ratings (Nisbet, Tindall, & Arroyo, 2005).

In addition, the study used the SILL Korean version prepared by Park Bun-Seon, Kwon Mi-Jeong, & Hwang Jung-Hwa (1998) so that the Koreans will fully understand the statements in their own context. The validity and reliability of this measure was computed using the Chronbach's alpha. The content of the SILL Korean version was back translated by a Korean who is fluent in both Korean and English in their study. This is to validate if the items have the same meaning

compared to the English version of the SILL—where the researchers used as the reference for analysis. The internal consistency of the SILL Korean version using Cronbach's Alpha is .90, indicating a high reliability because it is almost close to 1. The Cronbach's alpha of the SILL subscales are .71, .64, .68, .83, .63, and .76 respectively.

The English subtest of the Assessment of School Potential (ASP) was used to measure English ability. The test was developed by the Asian Psychological Services and Assessment Corporation. The subtest on English is composed of grammar usage (14 items), vocabulary (9 items), detecting grammatical errors (8 items), and reading comprehension (19 items). The skills in the English subtest were confirmed in a measurement model with adequate fit (ASP Manual, 2007). The English subtest is significantly related with the vocabulary and English subtests of the Otis Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT), Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), and Slosson Full-Range Intelligence Test (S-FRIT) which indicates the test equally measuring the same English abilities. Two forms of the test were developed and the two forms were highly correlated with evidence of parallel form reliability ( $r=.97$ ). High internal consistencies were also established using Cronbach's alpha for each forms (.91 and .89). The items upon selected were calibrated with person ability and item difficulty using the Rasch IRT technique. All items in the two forms have adequate fit using the Rasch model where items of considerable difficulty were answered by the respondents with high ability and easy items have high percentage of correct responses. The form A of the English test was used in the present study and the internal consistency of the English Ability test is .61, indicating a moderate reliability.

## Procedure

The researchers first made arrangements and asked permission to the different schools for the administration of the SILL and English test. Since not all schools are exclusive for Korean students, the English Language Coordinator or the School Counselor (For grade school to high school) either pulled out Korean students from different sections or will only include Koreans enrolled in their special programs (if ever they have such offerings) like the English Language Learning (ELL). These students range from grade six to College students ages 14-18 years old. Most importantly, the participants should agree to participate in the study because this study was done in a voluntary basis. There were no incentives given to the participants.

During the testing date, the participants were asked to stay in a quiet and conducive classroom to avoid distractions and other extraneous variables that might affect the test results. Since the participants should have an L1 of Korean and L2 of English, this was confirmed through a set of preliminary questions included in the questionnaire. The necessary instructions were given to the participants by reading a script and then the test questionnaires and answer sheets were distributed.

After explaining the instructions, the answer sheets were distributed followed by the English Proficiency test. Part one consisted of the 50 items in the English Proficiency Test which was administered for one hour. After finishing the test, the participants proceeded to the next part which is the Korean version of the

Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) with 50 items as well. This test was administered for 15 minutes.

After completing the tests, the researchers debriefed and thanked the participants for their time. Then after completing the data gathered, the two tests were checked and analyzed by the researchers.

## Results

The means and the standard deviation of all factors were determined. The scores for the subscales of the SILL (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social), months spent in the formal study of English, and English ability test were tested for significant relationship. Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum months and scores and Cronbach's alpha.

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive Statistics for SILL, Months Spent Studying Formal English and English Ability Test*

Factor	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's Alpha
Months Studying Formal English	302	36.45	30.91	
English Ability	302	18.48	5.33	0.61
SILL				0.90
Memory	302	2.05	0.59	0.71
Cognitive	302	2.05	0.38	0.64
Compensation	302	3.48	0.71	0.68
Metacognitive	302	3.34	0.72	0.83
Affective	302	3.14	0.74	0.63
Social	302	3.51	0.81	0.76

*Note.* The total score for the English ability test is 50. The SILL has a 5-point scale.

Means scores of Korean EFL learners in the SILL factors ranged from 2.05 to 3.51. The means for the SILL subscales showed a large spread as indicated by the standard deviations especially for Social and Affective strategies. The mean of the English Ability Test is 18.48 indicating that there is low proficiency because the middle score is 25. Means of the months in studying formal English is 36.45 with a very large spread. Furthermore, the distribution of scores was determined as show in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Range and Score Distribution for SILL, Months Spent Studying Formal English and English Ability Test*

Factor	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Months Studying Formal English	1	144	1.23	1.08
English Ability	5	35	0.69	0.30
<b>SILL</b>				
Memory	0.56	3.89	0.69	0.30
Cognitive	0.79	3	-0.29	0.47
Compensation	1	5	-0.41	0.55
Metacognitive	1.22	5	0.04	-0.06
Affective	1	5	-0.00	0.12
Social	1	5	-0.28	-0.10

The minimum months of studying formal English is one month and the maximum is 144 months (12 years), the large range of months resulted to a large standard deviation (30.91). For the English Ability Test, the minimum score is 5 and the maximum score is 35. The subscales of the SILL ranges around 0.56 to five and all factors are skewed to the left making the scores normally distributed. This is also true for the English Ability test, where the skewness is 0.69 and the kurtosis is 0.30. On the contrary, the skewness for the months studying formal English is 1.23 which is skewed to the right and the kurtosis is 1.08, that's why the researchers transformed the value to log functions to make the distribution normal. Furthermore, the Pearson r was used to establish the correlations of the subscales of the SILL and the English Ability Test scores. The relationship of the factors was determined using multivariate correlation as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
*Correlation Matrix of the SILL, Months Spent in Studying Formal English, and English Ability Test*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Months Studying (months)	---							
(2) English ability	.27**	---						
(3) Memory	.15**	.24**	---					
(4) Cognitive	.21**	.27**	.63**	---				
(5) compensation	.13*	.26**	.49**	.51**	---			
(6) metacognitive	.17**	.26**	.56**	.72**	.50**	---		
(7) affective	.03	.13*	.40**	.52**	.41**	.53**	---	
(8) social	.19**	.19**	.44**	.56**	.47**	.60**	.51**	---

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

The findings showed that the subscales of the SILL (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive and social) are all significantly related to the subtests of English proficiency,  $p < .05$ . Months of studying formal English is also significantly related to English ability and SILL subscales except for affective strategy. The magnitudes of all the correlation coefficients are all positive. This shows that as the subscales of SILL increases (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, and social), the subtests of the English proficiency also increases. The correlation values indicate moderate to weak strengths.

The data was analyzed using multiple regression, this analysis was used to determine sets of independent variables (SILL) and clarifies a part of the variance in a dependent variable (English proficiency) in a significant level. It also provides the predictive significance of the independent variables. This technique assumes that there is a linear relationship of the factors of the Language Learning Strategies and English Proficiency. The predictors included the six factors in the SILL by Oxford (1990) and the number of months spent in a formal English education. The English proficiency test served as the criterion.

Scores with high residuals were removed during data mining to ensure the linearity of the variables to English proficiency. The participants from 326 were reduced to 302 samples. In the regression analysis, the six SILL factors together with the months spent in studying formal English were entered as predictors where the influence of each predictor is assessed. The significance of the predictors was determined by checking if the p-value is less than any of the margin of error. The change in R was observed by adding the number of months in the formal study of English in the second regression analysis. Table 4 shows the individual contributions of each predictor of English proficiency in the SILL factors and the change in R when months are added with SILL predictors.

**Table 4**  
***Multiple Regression Model of SILL and Months Spent in Formal Study of English as Predictors of English Proficiency***

	Beta	SE of Beta	B	t	p
compensation	3.28*	1.57	0.14*	2.10	0.04*
Cognitive	2.24	2.15	0.10	1.04	0.30
Memory	1.51	1.95	0.06	0.77	0.44
metacognitive	1.41	2.07	0.06	0.68	0.50
Social	0.05	1.44	0.00	0.04	0.97
Affective	-0.87	1.38	-0.04	-0.63	0.53
months of studying	0.83*	0.30	0.16*	2.75	0.01*

\* $p < .05$

Note. Model 1  $R = .32$ ,  $R^2 = .10$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .08$ ,  $SE = .510$

Model 2  $R = .35$ ,  $R^2 = .12$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .10$ ,  $SE = .504$

In the regression model, compensation strategy and months studying English is found to be significant and the remaining predictors were not significant. The data do not fit the regression model and it accounts for  $R^2_{adj} = 10\%$ , but the SILL explaining compensation strategy and months spent studying English significantly predicts English proficiency,  $F(7, 302) = 5.94$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . With other

variables held constant, compensation strategy and the months spent in formal study in English scores were positively related to English proficiency, increasing by 3.28 and 0.83 for every point in the English proficiency respectively. The effect of compensation and months spent in formal study of English to English proficiency was significant,  $t(302) = 2.10, p < 0.05$  and  $t(302) = 2.75, p < 0.05$  respectively.

### Discussion

The major finding for this study showed that compensation strategy has a stronger effect in increasing English proficiency of the Korean students learning EFL based on the multiple regression model. Compensation strategies are needed to overcome any gaps in knowledge of the language (Oxford, 1990, p.71). Compensation strategies allow the learners to guess the meanings of the unfamiliar words they encounter (Yang, 2007). Through the collaboration of time spent studying English in a formal setting, it enables learners to be exposed to situations that will trigger their usage of language learning strategies that will eventually lead to increasing their proficiency in English.

Another finding is that the number of months learning formal English increases as the English proficiency of Korean students also increases. The time spent in studying English in the formal setting and the proper application of language learning strategies are essential in increasing one's proficiency. Research shows that it requires four to nine years to develop academic language skills and about two years to communicative skills using the target language (Cummins 1981; as cited in Vazquez, Vazquez, Lopes & Ward, 1997). The years spent in studying formal English is important because in a formal educational setting the Korean EFL learners communicate and interact with teachers and students who are more knowledgeable with the English language, thus, influencing them to the usage of language learning strategies. The longer the time spent learning the English language in a formal study, the stronger the skills become to succeed in acquiring the level of proficiency. As the months or years progress, the learner can evaluate his or her learning style to be able to select the best possible language strategies to use. In a formal educational setting, teachers can assess the performance of students in the target language being learned. Through teachers' evaluation, students become aware of their ability and proficiency in English, thus, it can lead them to explore more strategies that will help them in language learning. For instance, if teachers converse with the Korean EFL learners, they are then exposed to the target language. Korean learners may not comprehend every meaning of the words; therefore they will employ the use of language learning strategies, specifically compensation strategies.

There are several reasons why the individual SILL subscales failed to predict the English proficiency of Korean students. First, affective strategies can hinder or slow down the learning process due to anxiety especially among beginners EFL learners (Ariza, 2002; Tanveer, 2007). But, it is possible that learners are not familiar with paying attention to their own feeling (Oxford, 1990). In this case, the Koreans may not be skilled in identifying their own feeling while learning EFL. For memory strategies on the other hand, it was found out that Asian students tend to prefer rote memorization strategies and rule-oriented strategies, but



in this study it is otherwise (Nationality & language learning strategies of ELT-major university students, 2004). Possibly, rote learning is not utilized for Korean learners because this specific strategy is useful for quickly learning vocabularies—which is important especially in the beginning and intermediate stages of language learning but not necessarily later (Oxford, Cho, Leung, & Kim, 2004). Also, the use of memory strategies by EFL learners may indicate a cultural habit just like the Australian students, who revealed that remembering difficult words was not effective as opposed to Indonesians who confessed that they have a habit of rote learning behavior (Lengkanawati, 2004). Perhaps, Koreans does not use rote memorizations as a habit in learning. Furthermore, it is interesting to know that social strategies are not significant for Korean learners in predicting English proficiency because the growing number of Koreans in the Philippines may actually lessen their socialization among the natives especially when the EFL learners are always with a Korean companion.

The stage in learning a foreign language of the English learner explains why the individual SILL failed to predict English proficiency. Majority of the participants are just starting to study English and they are accustomed only to their L1. Children who already have solid literacy skills seem to be the best position to acquire a new language effectively (Why would I want to teach in Korea, 2003). It is assumed that the older the age, the more solid the literacy skills of the learners especially in their L1.

The majority of the participants in the study are young adolescents who are considered beginners in learning EFL—most of them are those who are not yet mainstreamed. As compared to other studies, the participants are composed of mostly college students majoring in English. In addition, age as a factor was shown by several studies that adolescents tend to use guessing and social strategies like discussing and asking help from others (Lee & Oxford, 2008). While an adult learner uses metacognition strategies such as planning, organizing, and evaluating one's learning (Lee & Oxford, 2008). It is worth mentioning that autonomy is important in acquiring a new language (Nisbet, Tindall, & Arroyo, 2005; Chamot, 1998). Adolescents may lack autonomy and it explains the results of this study—having only compensation strategy as significant. Autonomy perhaps is essential in comprehending the variations in language learning strategy usage and English proficiency (Nisbet, Tindall, & Arroyo, 2005). Also, it explains that lack of autonomy may not have awareness in one's own strategy which is closely related to metacognition (Chamot, 1998). Consequently, successful learners are those who are aware of their strategy; use more combinations of it, and carefully executing or applying the strategies (Ok, 2003). In Vann and Abraham's (1990) study, they stated that unsuccessful learners are actively using these strategies, however, in an uncoordinated manner. Accordingly, it can be reported that skillful usage of language learning strategies can heighten proficiency (Nisbet, Tindall, & Arroyo, 2005).

The individual SILL strategies failed to predict English proficiency is possibly because the learners in this study may need more guidance by teachers since in using the strategies. Chamot (1998) emphasized that learning strategies are teachable (see also Green & Oxford, 1995). It that way students can become more aware of strategies through strategy instruction until they become autonomous and

can be put to mainstream courses in English. Besides, according to Wenden (1985), the autonomy of students and learners should be aligned with teacher's goal of facilitating self-directed learning by introducing and recommending strategies to encourage the learners to discover which strategy suits them better (Yang, 2007).

In the bivariate correlation, the SILL such as memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, and social, together with months spent in studying English are significantly correlated to English proficiency. However the affective and the months spent in formal study of English showed no significant correlations. In contrast, the findings for the multiple regression showed that each of the language learning strategies did not significantly predict English proficiency except for compensation. The Koreans has limited knowledge in English (evident in their English ability mean scores) that is why it appears that the compensation strategies work best with the Korean EFL learners in the Philippines in learning English because they compensate to the missing information through guessing meanings from context, switching to the mother tongue, using synonyms and gestures to convey meaning (Ok, 2003). Another reason is because some strategies could be attributed to culture and educational system (Shamis, 2002). In the Philippines, the teachers and so as the natives when communicating often use gestures to convey meaning. This may be a reason on how Koreans have adopted the culture of Filipinos and thus they have used it to also communicate effectively.

Finally, the number of months in formal study of English showed positive magnitude with English proficiency indicating that as the number of months increase, the English proficiency of Korean students also increases. This is was consistent in the multiple regression where the number of months spent in formal study of English is significant in predicting English proficiency. Studying in a formal English setting enable EFL students to communicate and interact with their English instructors and classmates. Since through formal studying, learners get educated with the rules in grammar and pronunciation, resulting in increased proficiency in English. Krashen's theory of foreign language acquisition has five main hypotheses. Korean students are able to assess these hypotheses through being enrolled in a formal classroom studying English. In the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis and Natural Order hypothesis, it implies that, through language learning, students have increased awareness on the grammar and vocabulary rules of their foreign language. Teachers play an important role in the students' language acquisition because they educate and familiarize students' knowledge on language rules. In the Monitor hypothesis, it states that students have the ability to concentrate on forms and rules of the target language. This is assessed through essay compositions, grammar and vocabulary test given by teachers to the students in class. In the Input hypothesis, it emphasizes the importance of time in developing student's competency. Through a formal classroom setting, teachers and students can work hand in hand in monitoring their progress on the English language over time. Lastly with the Affective filter hypothesis, it discusses the significance of student's emotions during language acquisition. The role of teachers is vital since they are able to influence student's motivation through evaluations in their assessments of their proficiency and knowledge in the English language. Therefore, the longer the number of months spent in studying English, the better proficiency in English because of the longer exposure on the target language. The learners in this case can maximize the

use of language learning strategies due to the communicative demand from the environment (Lan & Oxford, 2003).

Generally the present reviews only indicates that the use of language learning strategies help increase language learners proficiency in English. The present study was able to find out that language learning strategies alone is not enough to help language learners acquire proficiency in English. The language learning strategies proposed by Oxford works best when taken together and its use is stronger in predicting English proficiency if the time spent in studying formal English is sufficient.

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### Author Notes

Special thanks to Khristine Co, Mathilde Fajardo, and Cher Dy for synthesizing the reviews and helping me gather the data for this study.