Using Oxford's Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) to Assess the Strategy Use of a Group of First and Third Year EFL Algerian University Students

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Abstract

The present study aims at investigating the patterns of language learning strategy use employed by two groups of students enrolled in a three-year English degree course in the department of English of the University of Algiers 2, each one including 56 learners among first and third-year students. To reach this objective, Oxford's Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) (1990) along with a background questionnaire (a modified version of Oxford's background questionnaire) were administered to first-year and third-year students. The findings indicate that participants from both years use language learning strategies, but with differences in type and frequency. Third-year students reported a high frequent use of metacognitive strategies, whereas first-year students reported a high use of compensation strategies. The results also indicate that female subjects' strategy use was higher than that of male subjects in all the types and categories of the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning. Based on the findings of the present study, some pedagogical implication were suggested to encourage students to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses in skills and content courses and self-regulate learning so as to make progress with teachers' assistance.

Keywords: language learning strategies (LLS); Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL); memory strategies; cognitive strategies; metacognitive strategies; socio-affective strategies; compensation strategies.

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1. Introduction

LMD (Licence/Master/Doctorat) is an educational system recently introduced in the English Department, University of Algiers2 (Aboulkacem Saadllah), as a global reform of higher education system to meet the standards imposed by the new socio-economic data. It is meant to place the student in the center of the university system; the student has a different role, that to be an active agent and to be responsible for his/her learning. By this system, students are expected to develop a range of language learning tools and strategies that will help them to be more independent and autonomous learners. In parallel to this new shift of interest, how students process the received knowledge or information, and what kinds of strategies they employ to understand, learn or remember the information is the focus of the present research. In a systematic approach, the LMD is a set of elements that interact to form an integrated whole, working for a common objective. Put differently, in the LMD system, all the components including teachers and students have become involved. The teacher is expected to offer training courses tailored to the available resources and skills based on a pedagogical team, and the student can choose the path that suits him, he/ she participates actively in his training and is more supported through a tutoring system for which he/ she is actively accompanied. This shift of interest oriented the line of this study towards the students' employed strategies while understanding, manipulating, and storing received information.

Oxford defines language learning strategies as the "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations." [1] Thus, language learning strategies can be regarded as steps or techniques that students use to improve their progress in comprehending, internalizing and using the second/ foreign language. However, Teachers still play an important role in guiding students to self-directed learning and to evaluate their own processes even though strategy training aims to encourage students to take control of their own learning. Reference [2] believes that a teacher's first act should be to identify the students' learning strategies so that instruction can be adapted accordingly and to direct learners on when and how to use strategies from the beginning. When learners become independent and can use strategies appropriately, teachers still need to evaluate their strategy use and provide additional support. In other words, teachers play a central role in language learning strategy instruction.

Reference [3] considers that self-regulated learners display metacognitive, motivational and strategic control in their learning. This control is accomplished through goal setting, planning, monitoring, regulating and evaluation when learning. Besides, successful learners understand a range of effective learning strategies and know how to select the most appropriate one [3]. However, a learner may be experienced using certain strategies in one learning context, those same strategies may not be necessarily effective for another learning situation, thus, learners require support in understanding effective learning strategies, when to use them and how to select strategies depending on the learning context. Students are not always conscious of the strategies they employ, nor are learners necessarily well informed of the possible strategies from which to choose. Evidence suggests that even accomplished students can be unaware of the study tactics they use, and often employ ineffective strategies for the task at hand. However, educators are well positioned to support students with the necessary skills to identify and use LLS known to be effective in a given situation.

This research is meant to extend knowledge of how university students at different levels (first-year and third-year students) tackle their learning: do they employ language learning strategies, what are the LLS used? And how often they are used? The research is also expected to extend research findings on language learning strategies in a foreign language learning context. As such, one of the objectives of the study is to investigate the LLS used by Algerian University students when tackling the everyday demands of learning. One of our research premises is that foreign language students would show different uses of LLS with relation to their level of study, proficiency, and gender. Thus, a primary concern in this study is to investigate and compare the use of LLS by first and third-year university students at different stages in the learning process and identify most frequently LLS utilized by the students who participated in the study. The research also aims at establishing the relationship, if any, between the use of LLS and other factors such as gender, proficiency, or level of study. The research tool being used to fulfill these goals is the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL), it is meant to assess strategy use among a group of fifty-six, first-year students and another group of fifty-six, third-year students. The first research question to be discussed and answered is formulated as follows:

R. Q1**:** Do students employ language learning strategies?

Three sub-questions derive from this research question. The first and second questions are related to the overall language learning strategy frequency of use; strategy use frequency in each category of the SILL, and individual strategy items. And the third one is meant to find a possible relationship between participants' strategy use and proficiency.

- What are the general patterns of language learning strategy use among both groups?
- What is the frequency of LLS use among the two groups of students?
- Will third-year university students use more often LLS than first-year students?

There is another learning variable in addition to proficiency that might influence strategy use; it consists of gender. The question of gender differences has been addressed by several researchers in the literature on language learning. Reference [4] refer to the finding by [5] that females who completed the SILL reported using strategies far more often than did males in three of the five factors: formal related practice, general studies strategies, and conversational input elicitation strategies. Hence, the second research question is formulated as the following:

R. Q2: Is there a gender difference in the students' use of language learning strategies?

2. Method

An exploratory research was chosen to meet the objectives of the present study, and it was conducted to achieve a broader understanding of the use of LLS by a group of Algerian University students, in addition to the identification of key issues and key variables in strategy use. A hundred and twelve (N=112) University students enrolled in a three-year English degree course in the English Department of the University of Algiers 2 participated in this study. The sample was divided into two groups; first-year students (Group 1) and third-year

students (Group 2). Bearing in mind that these students had different levels of proficiency, they were divided into freshers (students beginning their university study) and seniors or final year students. Group I consisted of fifty-six (N=56) first-year students, it comprised forty-one (N=41) females and fifteen (N=15) males aged between eighteen and twenty-nine. They are all assumed to have followed a regular schooling scheme, which implies that they would have studied English for at least eight years, before entering University. The second, chosen sample for the survey also consisted of fifty-six (N=56) third-year university students, specialized in Linguistics and Didactics. The second group included forty-six (N=46) females and ten (N=10) males, aged between twenty and twenty-eight.

Data in this research were collected using two questionnaires submitted to both groups; they consist of a background questionnaire and the SILL. Researchers have used an array of methods for diagnosing the mental processes employed by learners while trying to comprehend, remember and use language. Observing students in language classrooms did not provide consistent results as a method of identifying LLS because most learning strategies are mental processes and cannot be observed directly. They can only be deduced from language learner behavior as it is maintained by authors such as [6], Naiman and his colleagues [7], References [8, 9]. Ellis [10] points out: "it is a bit like trying to work out the classification system of a library when the only evidence to go on consists of the few books you have been allowed to take out". Therefore, research in this area has relied more on learners' self-reports, which were made through retrospective interviews, questionnaires, written diaries and journals, and think-aloud protocols concurrently with a learning task. The only way to gain insight into the unobservable mental learning strategies of learners is by asking them to reveal and describe their thinking processes.

The SILL is the most widely used data collection instrument in second/foreign language learning investigations in several countries. Reference [4] noted that by 1995, the SILL was utilized as a primary, key instrument in more than forty studies, including twelve dissertations and theses. These comprised almost 8,000 students around the world. Relying on its extensive use and the fact that the SILL covers a large number of LLS, it was decided to use it as a research tool in the current study to assess first-year and third-year students' general use of LLS and to raise their awareness as to the existence and use of language learning strategies. Before administering the SILL, there was a background questionnaire to be completed by both groups (a modified version of Oxford's Background questionnaire). The background questionnaire aimed at identifying the informants' age, gender, years of English study, estimated (self-rated) proficiency, and their reasons for choosing English as a subject. The investigation of the participants' background may provide a better understanding of their learning behavior.

Oxford's SILL consists of four sections: the questionnaire, answer sheet, a result profile sheet, and a strategy classification description sheet. However, in this study, the students were given just the questionnaire and the answer sheet and they were invited to answer the questionnaire and to enter their results on the worksheet. The SILL is organized into six strategy groups, which are categorized according to Oxford's original identification and classification system as follows:

● **Part A: Memory strategies** also called mnemonics are strategies used for storing, remembering, and

retrieving information. Memory strategies "reflect very simple principles, such as arranging things in order, making associations, and reviewing. These principles all involve meaning," [1] and that these associations and the arrangement "must be personally meaningful to the learner, and the material to be reviewed must have significance", [1]. Oxford's SILL comprises 9 memory strategy items that fall into four sets: "Creating Mental Linkages, Applying Images and Sounds, Reviewing Well, and Employing Actions" [1].

● **Part B: Cognitive strategies** are mental processes that are essential in learning a new language, such strategies range from "repeating to analyzing expressions to summarizing… with all their variety, cognitive strategies are unified by a common function: manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner." [1] This strategy category is the largest strategy group in the SILL. It includes 14 items covering practice-related strategies, and deep processing by which learners analyze new information and monitor comprehension.

● **Part C: Compensation strategies** "enable learners to use the new language for either comprehension or production despite limitations in knowledge." [1] There are 6 items, with strategies such as guessing the meaning from context and using gestures or synonyms to conveying meaning when language is limited. These strategies are grouped into two sets: guessing intelligently in listening and reading, and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing", (ibid.)

● **Part D: Metacognitive strategies** are "means beyond, beside, or with the cognitive." [1] Thus, metacognitive strategies are "actions which go beyond purely cognitive devices and which provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process." [1] The SILL comprises 9 metacognitive strategies that can be grouped into three strategy sets: "Centering Your Learning, Arranging and Planning Your Learning, and Evaluating Your Learning." [1]

● **Part E: Affective strategies:** the term affective refers to affective factors such as: "emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values," [1] and affective strategies help learners in gaining control over these factors. The SILL includes 6 affective strategies that can be grouped under three main sets as anxiety reduction, and self-encouragement and reward [1].

● **Part F: Social strategies** "language is a form of social behavior; it is communication, and communication occurs between and among people," Reference [1] and learning a language consequently requires "other people, and appropriate social strategies are very important in this process." Reference [1] The SILL comprises 6 social strategies including asking questions, cooperating with peers, becoming culturally aware.

It should be mentioned that the SILL was previously piloted study with a sample of first and third- year students at the University of Algiers 2. The participants had to consider each item (strategy) and then rate them on a five-level Likert scale, which is described as providing a range of possible responses [11]. The SILL's Likert scale consists of:

1. Never true of me

2. Usually not true of me

3. Somewhat true of me

4. Usually true of me

5. Always true of me.

However, the participants in this pilot study faced difficulties in making the distinction between the five options they were given, and it took too long to fill in the SILL. They told the researcher that it would be easier for them to complete the questionnaire if they were given just three options instead of five. For this reason, it was decided to use a three-point Likert scale that consists of:

1. Often (implies that the participant recognizes the use of the strategy and he/she uses it several times)

2. Sometimes (indicates that the participant recognizes the use of the strategy, and he/she uses it on few occasions)

3. Never (implies that the participant does not use the strategy at all)

The numbers (1, 2, & 3) have no numerical value; the scale is an ordinal one. The participants were asked to indicate a response, 1 through 3, to each item, all of which represent strategy descriptions. For example, under Part A, "I use new words in a sentence so I can remember them," or from Part D, "I pay attention when someone is speaking English." The SILL's 50 items are not equally distributed for each part, as certain classifications of strategies contain a greater variety of possible approaches. For example, Part B (cognitive strategies) contains 14 items, while Part C (compensatory strategies) contains only six items.

In the present study, data were analyzed using statistical descriptive analysis. The statistical analysis consisted mainly of the frequency of use in terms of percentages of subjects' responses to each individual item in the survey. These percentages of responses were then graphically displayed to allow for a holistic view of the results and were used to draw conclusions about the different points raised in the study.

3. Results

3.1. Results of the Background Questionnaire

• **Age, Gender, and years of study of English**

The first part of the background questionnaire (Questions 1, 2, & 3) was meant to elicit students' personal information such as age, gender and years of studying English. The responses indicate that Group 1 comprises forty-one females and fifteen males aged between eighteen and twenty-nine. All the subjects belonging to this group studied English for eight years before attending university. Concerning the second Group, it comprises forty-six females and ten males aged between twenty and twenty-seven, these students studied English for ten years.

• **Students' perceived English proficiency compared with other students**

Students were asked to self-rate their English proficiency compared with other students on a 4 point scale: **Excellent, Good, Fair, and Poor** (Question 4). However, this self-rating is a general indication that students have about their own proficiency, and the provided answers derive from their personal perceptions. Three proficiency levels out of four were selected by participants, namely, Good, Fair, and Poor. Only twenty-seven students (i.e. 48%) belonging to Group 1 seem to have confidence in their language proficiency they rated their proficiency level as Good. Whereas, 38 % of participants consider they have a Fair English proficiency compared to other students, and 14 % rated their proficiency in the studied language as poor. The results suggest that third-year students appear to be more confident about their English proficiency. Thirty-eight students out of 56 (i.e. 68%) rated their proficiency as Good, fourteen students (i.e. 25%) reported to have a fair proficiency in English, and only eight students believed that their English was poor.

• **Other studied languages**

Students from both groups were asked (question 5) about the languages they studied in addition to English. The responses indicated that more than 80% of first-year students studied two languages (French & Spanish or French & German), 16 % dealt with French only, and only one student studied three languages (French /Spanish / German).Third-year students also seem to have studied different languages in addition to English. More than 80% of Group 2 students studied at least two languages; 68% studied either French& Spanish or French & German, 14 % studied three languages (French /Spanish / German), and 16% studied only one language (French).

• **Reasons for studying English**

There are similarities between both groups regarding their reasons for studying English at University. 95% of first-year students and 93% of third-year students reported to have vocational goals; they "need it for their future career." The second most cited reason by 82 % of Group 2 subjects is their interest in the language, and 66% of Group 1 students cited this reason, it is their third most cited reason. Students' need for English to travel also seems popular among first-year students (70%) and third-year students (57%). However, a small number of students from both groups referred to their interest in the culture or their need for English to socialize. Thus, the majority of students from both levels seem to have vocational goals. We shall now turn to exposing the data collected from the SILL.
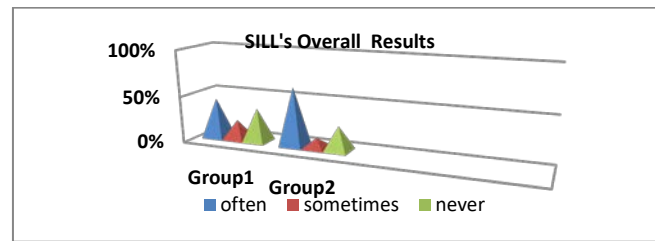
3.2. The SILL's Results

The SILL's overall results revealed significant differences between both groups in strategy use; these differences are apparent in the types of strategies and the frequency of use. First-year students can be considered as average users of LLS as the highest percentage of the most often used LLS 43% (it was decided earlier in this study that a percentage between 40% and 60% illustrates an average strategy use). Third-year students compared to first-year students reported a higher use of LLS, their strategy use can be regarded as high as the percentage of the most often used strategies is above 60%, i.e. 63% (it was decided that a percentage above 60% describes a high strategy use). Table 1 exhibits the overall SILL's results obtained by both groups, and these

results will be later presented in Figure 1 to display the frequency of LLS use.

**Table 1:** SILL's overall results obtained by the two groups

	Often %	**Sometimes %**	**Never %**
Group 1	43%	21%	36%
Group 2	63%	11%	26%

Figure 1: SILL's overall results

The SILL's results show that both first-year (Group1) and third-year (Group 2) students use language learning strategies, however, they show some differences in the type of strategies used and the frequency of use. Therefore, the results presented graphically in the figure below indicate that freshers use less often LLS than final year students, and the kind of LLSs used by both groups is different. The calculated percentages show that Group 1 students are average users of LLS whereas Group 2 students are high consumers of LLS. Concerning the SILL's six categories, the results obtained indicate that first-year students' most used category of strategies is the Type C (Compensation Strategies) with a percentage of 57%. Whereas Social Strategies (Type F) are the second most often used, they are thus ranked in the second position with a rate of 46%. Cognitive Strategies (Type B) and Metacognitive Strategies (Type D) come at the third position with an equal percentage of 44%. Affective Strategies (Type E) are often used by only 40% of students, and Memorizing Strategies are ranked in the last position as being the least used type of LLS with a percentage of 32%. This last finding is in accordance with the results obtained from third-year students' responses; Memorizing Strategies are the least used strategies with a percentage of 36%. The results also indicate that third-year students' second least used type of LLS is Type E (Affective strategies) with a percentage of 52%. Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies are ranked in the third position with an approximatively equal percentage of 64%, then the Affective Strategies in the fourth position with a rate of 40%.
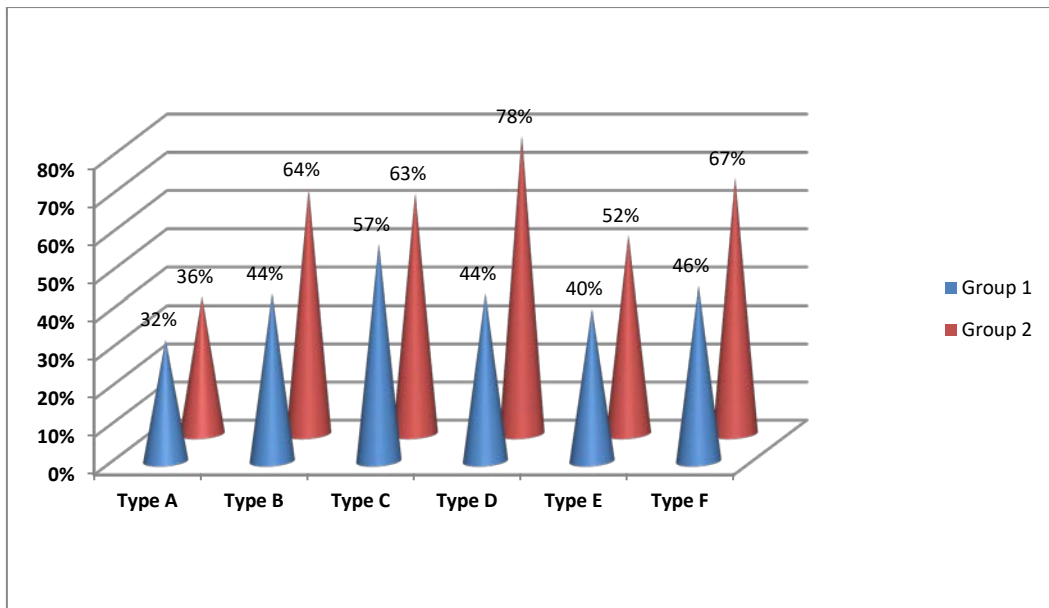
Figure 2: Classification of LLS types in terms of frequency of use

Tables 2 and 3 respectively present a classification of the different types of LLS used by both Groups, according to their frequency of use, they are ranked from often used to least used.

Table 2: Classification of LLS types used by Group 1 students according to their frequency of use

Rank	The Type of Strategy	Strategy Categories		Global Percent %
1	**Type C** Compensation Strategies	**Paraphrasing**	**70%**	**57%**
		Using gestures	**63%**	
		Guessing	**59%**	
		Coining words	**48%**	
		Adjusting the information	**45%**	
2	**Type F** Social Strategies	**Asking Questions**	**48%**	**46%**
		Cooperating with others	**46%**	
		Cultural Awareness	**34%**	
3	**Type B** Cognitive Strategies	**Skimming & Scanning**	**70%**	**44%**
		Practicing	**50%**	
		Analysing & Reasoning	**30%**	
		Summarizing	**30%**	
4	**Type D** Metacognitive Strategies	**Centering learning**	**55%**	**44%**
		Evaluating learning	**52%**	
		Planning learning	**39%**	
5	**Type E** Affective Strategies	**Reducing Anxiety**	**57%**	**40%**
		Encouraging oneself	**52%**	
		Emotional state	**26%**	
6	**Type A** Memory Strategies	**Visual**	**54%**	**32%**
		Auditory	**25%**	
		Tactile	**6%**	

Table 3: Classification of LLS types used by Group 2 students according to their frequency of use

Rank	The Type of Strategy	Strategy Categories		Global Percent %
1	**Type D** Metacognitive Strategies	**Centering learning**	**89%**	**57%**
		Evaluating learning	**75%**	
		Planning learning	**84%**	
2	**Type F** Social Strategies	**Asking Questions**	**69%**	**46%**
		Cooperating with others	**68%**	
		Cultural Awareness	**57%**	
3	**Type B** Cognitive Strategies	**Skimming & Scanning**	**71%**	**44%**
		Practicing	**71%**	
		Summarizing	**68%**	
		Analysing & Reasoning	**49%**	
4	**Type C** Compensation Strategies	**Paraphrasing**	**89%**	**44%**
		Using gestures	**64%**	
		Guessing	**64%**	
		Coining words	**48%**	
		Adjusting the information	**48%**	
5	**Type E** Affective Strategies	**Reducing Anxiety**	**68%**	**40%**
		Encouraging oneself	**58%**	
		Emotional state	**42%**	
6	**Type A** Memory Strategies	**Visual**	**54%**	**32%**
		Auditory	**25%**	
		Tactile	**6%**	

Concerning individual learning strategies (strategy items), the results show that first-year students' most often used strategies (with a percentage above (60%) are: (1) skimming and scanning (70%); paraphrasing (70%); (3) guessing in reading (64%); (4) Practicing (63%); (5) using gestures (63%); and (6) using imagery (63%). Whereas third-year students' most often used strategies are: (1) Paying attention, centering learning (89%); (2) paraphrasing (89%); (3) seeking practice opportunities, planning (88%); (4) self-evaluating (84%); (5) self-monitoring (84%); (6) practicing (79%). It seems that only paraphrasing and practicing as learning strategies are often used by both groups, despite these two strategies, there are no similarities between them.

Third-year students rely more on and most often on metacognitive strategies whereas first-year students appear to use more often compensation strategies. These results are displayed in Tables 4 & 5 and graphically presented in Figure 3.

Table 4: The most often used LLS items by Group 1 students

Rank	The Strategy	Percent %
1	**Skimming and Scanning**	**70%**
2	**Paraphrasing**	**70%**
3	**Guessing in reading**	**64%**
4	**Practicing**	**63%**
5	**Miming or using gestures**	**63%**
6	**Using imagery**	**61%**

Table 5: The most often used LLS item by Group 2 students

Rank	The Strategy Name	Percent
1	**Paying attention (centering learning)**	**89%**
2	**Paraphrasing**	**89%**
3	**Seeking practice opportunities (Planning)**	**88%**
4	**Self-evaluating**	**84%**
5	**Self-monitoring.**	**84%**
6	**Practicing**	**79%**
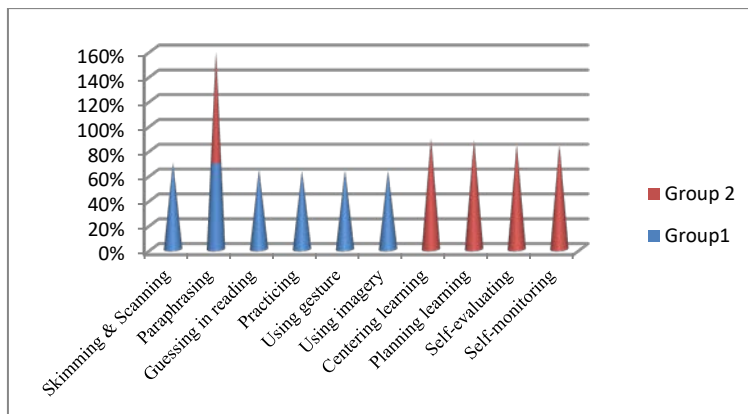
Figure 3: The most often used LLS items by both Groups

3.3. SILL's results in relation to gender

Although the number of male students is limited compared to females, 15 students out of 56, i.e. 27% in Group 1 and 10 students out of 56, i.e. 18% in Group 2, we believe that it can be representative to a certain extent. The

SILL's results illustrate that male students use less often LLSs than female students A closer examination of the percentages indicates that most male students do not use LLS frequently, but there is an exception, students from both groups who are successful (relying on the students' results provided by the administration) use LLS often than the other male students who are less successful.

4. Discussion

The first step in this study consisted in assessing the participants' use of language learning strategies. We aimed at answering the following research question: Do students employ language learning strategies? Three sub-questions derived from this first research question, they were meant to describe the participants' overall strategy use, and their strategy use in each of the six strategy types of the SILL (i.e. memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, social, and affective), in addition to the identification of the participants' most and least used individual language learning strategies. The results of the study indicated that participants from both groups used language learning strategies, but with differences in type and frequency. The SILL's overall results showed that first-year students reported an average strategy use with an overall percentage of 43%. However, third-year students showed a higher use of language learning strategies with an overall percentage of 63%. Thus, higher level, third-year students made highly frequent use of a large number of language learning strategies.

When compared with the strategies favored by first-year students, the strategies typical of higher level (third-year) students appeared to be metacognitive self- regulation strategies that help them control and modify their cognitive processes. Accordingly, the findings revealed that the difference in strategy use between the two Groups is significant for three strategy types: Metacognitive strategies (Type D), Cognitive strategies (Type B), and Social strategies (Type F). These three strategy types have been employed significantly more by third-year students than first-year students. Whereas first-year students most used strategy-type was the Compensation type (Type C).

The SILL's overall results showed that only 26% of the total number of third-year students involved in the study reported to never use LLS, 11% of them reported to employ LLS occasionally and more than 60% reported to frequently and extensively use LLSs while learning. Thus, there is a difference between the two groups in the overall strategy use and in all types of strategies except for the memory strategies which were the least used strategy type by both groups. Besides, the results showed that proficiency gained from the years of study influences strategy use positively, in other words; strategy use increases with the growth of the demands that the high proficient students encounter while studying at university. These results will be further explained as we discuss the results obtained for each strategy type of the SILL and the different strategy categories.

One of this study's objectives was to establish a possible link between proficiency and language learning strategy use. Proficiency in this work is determined by the years of study or the year level. First-Year University students (freshmen beginning their university studies) are considered as less proficient than third-year students (seniors finishing their three years of graduation). It is worth noting that the differences reported by the two groups in terms of strategy use indicate that the number of years of study significantly affect strategy use. Compared to first-year students, third-year students have shown higher use of overall LLS and greater use of all

the categories of the SILL. This outcome is consistent with previous studies in that more proficient learners used more LLS than less proficient learners e.g. [4, 6, 8, 12]. Third-year students' high use of metacognitive strategies implies that they can "plan for effective and active learning, select proper strategies, monitor their learning process, orchestrate various strategies when performing tasks and finally they would evaluate the process and their strategic use of their language learning" Andesron [13].

In fact, students in Year 3 are expected to use these strategies in writing academic essays, synthesizing information, reading articles or book chapters, preparing presentations as well as taking exams. Metacognitive knowledge is closely related to enhancement in academic performance, and by employing this type of strategy; these students may not only do better in terms of studying content but further advance and improve their English proficiency [13]. Group 2 students also reported a high use of cognitive and compensation strategies. This finding suggests that they are able to choose proper strategies while learning (metacognitive strategy), and they know how to improve their skills (cognitive strategies). Also, the high use of compensation knowledge entails that they have more vocabulary that enables them to guess intelligently while reading and provide their intended meaning in the productive skills (speaking and writing).

Informants from both groups in this study who self-rated their proficiency compared to other peers as "good", showed a higher and more frequent use of learning strategies than those who considered themselves as less proficient. Likewise, researchers such as [14,15] have postulated that students who see themselves as proficient learners show greater potential to learn a language and possibly have superior abilities in using English. Researchers in the field of language learning strategies indicated that more proficient learners tend to employ diverse strategies in many situations than less proficient learners. It has repeatedly been shown that there is a strong relationship between LLS and language performance. There is a strong correlation between LLS use and language performance, and weaker students lack a critical self-awareness (i.e. Strategies of self-monitoring and self-evaluation) while successful students have adopted these in addition to certain skills to benefit from any learning situation. Moreover, successful students use all available and choose suitable follow-up activities to tackle their problems and learning deficiencies as it is asserted by [16].

To sum up, it seems obvious that proficiency gained from the years of study influences strategy use positively, in other words; strategy use increases with the growth of the demands that the high proficient students encounter while studying at university. This result is consistent with that reported in other studies: Chamot and his colleagues [12,18,19,20]. These studies showed that language learning experience motivates learners to use more strategies that require planning and evaluation of learning, again, it goes along with the results obtained in this research as the most used type of LLS by third-year students were the metacognitive strategies with a percentage of 78%.

The SILL's results showed that male and female students exhibited different patterns of strategy use. Female students reported a greater frequency of strategy use in all types (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, social and affective strategies), and all categories of LLS than did male students. Females' desire

for good results can be related to their high strategy use compared to males, and it might reflect a need for social approval [5]. Some researchers explain this difference by referring to biological reasons and others refer to social justifications. Biologically speaking, research appears to indicate that women have more nerve cells in the left half of the brain where language is centered; besides, women often use both sides of the brain. However, there might be another possible reason behind girls' linguistic development, according to [20]: "much of the perceived female superiority in language capability may be due to the added effort which adults tend to lavish on baby girls compared with baby boys." [20] The findings of gender differences in the present study are in accordance with previous research studies e.g. References [21,22,23]. One possible explanation might be related to female's social skills, stronger verbal skills, and greater conformity to academic and linguistic norms [18]. Oxford and his colleagues [24] argued that female learners have an advantage over male learners with regard to language development because they are more likely to be interactive, and they have the will to communicate and socialize more than their counterparts. Besides, they are more likely to strive for higher grades and to use language learning strategies more frequently because of a stronger desire for social recognition and approval. Research, according to [25], has consistently found that female students are prepared to spend and invest more time and effort in studying languages because of the benefits they may have for their future. In contrast [20] considers that males are often interested only in the ultimate goal, and they tend to work alone more. Most studies that investigated language strategy use, according to gender seem to have reported a higher use of LLS by females. Reference [22] conducted an exploratory study at the Foreign Service Institute, and they concluded that female learners use more often LLS than male learners. The same conclusion was reached by Green & Reference [4] who investigated the LLS use of 374 students using the SILL, they found that women used strategies more often than males.

5. Recommendations

It is essential for students to understand and perceive the importance of using language learning strategies in the process of language learning; therefore, EFL teachers must convey this message to their students. The results of this research indicate that a significant number of first-year students do not make a frequent use of these strategies; hence, teachers could help students develop and raise their awareness of LLS. Every teacher can integrate some strategy training in his class; the focus of instruction is not only to transmit knowledge or information but also to teach students how to proceed when studying and identify the best strategies to use when tackling the everyday demands of learning. This may lead to increased student autonomy, and enhance their comprehension and production of the information being studied and the language of instruction. Brown [26] considers 'strategic investment' the learner's own personal commitment to time, effort, and attention. This commitment, according to him, is critical for students' success, and he invites teachers to grab every opportunity to help students develop and use strategies that will lead them to become more independent, capable of taking responsibility for their own learning.

In the LMD system, there is room for some counseling and tutoring, and students can benefit from strategy awareness raising during these sessions. These tutoring sessions can be used with the aim of supporting students to develop more effective learning strategies and practical ideas for their studies. Tutors need to explicitly concentrate on issues of effective strategy use and discourage students from the over-reliance on memorization

of content and information. However, tutors need some training and can benefit from other teachers' experiences by participating in professional development workshops. During these workshops, teachers can share their teaching experiences and their best instructional practices and strategies to empower students to become more strategic, self-regulated and take responsibility for their own learning and success.

The students involved in the study and who filled out the SILL appreciated the experience and found it beneficial. These students told us that the questionnaire led them to think and reflect on their learning and that it was something they were not used to. Hence, tutors can raise students' awareness regarding the type of LLSs that might be suitable for their own learning style or strategies that are appropriate to their situation. Thus, as a first step, it is essential to identify a student's learning styles and strategies [27]. Then tutors can ask students to complete Oxford's self- check questionnaire, as it is the most widely used questionnaire to assess students' strategy use. Learning style inventories or other forms or tools such as interviews, think-aloud procedures, or diaries can also be used to identify students' learning styles. Once enough information regarding students' learning styles and ways of studying has been gathered, teachers can help them to know the useful strategies in various contexts both inside and outside the classroom. Reference [26] provides examples of how to promote strategies in the classroom, including ways of lowering inhibitions and how to encourage risk-taking. According to him a number of strategies concerning reading and listening, such as elaboration and inferencing, selective attention to keywords, and taking notes, have proven to be successfully teachable. Reference [1] provides ample material and advice on how to teach strategies in relation to the four language skills, for example, how to use linguistic clues when reading in order to guess intelligently.

Although students are deemed to have a strong tradition of memorizing information, it is evident that the students, in our study, did not fully exploit the range of memory strategies available or listed in the SILL. It is advised that teachers take advantage of their students' willingness and ability to store information or vocabulary to memory by raising their awareness to the existence of a vast number of memory strategies other than the ones they are actually using.

Reference [28] believes that training students in the use of social-affective strategies can play a major role in enhancing their autonomy, self-confidence, motivation and positive attitudes. However, incorporating social-affective strategies in the classroom evokes a number of challenges teachers should take into account. Teachers should abandon their roles of knowledge transmitters and focus more on the students' learning processes and the outcomes. Social-affective strategies such as cooperation, asking questions, expressing feelings and attitudes, and taking calculated risks among others may be used in classroom discussion and project work. The Internet proved to be particularly relevant to the teaching of social-affective strategies. Using the Internet may provide students with genuine opportunities and tools to initiate conversations with native speakers, fellow students or other students all over the world by exchanging e-mails or via online chat, and engage in project work. Also, using e-mails and blogs can serve as a fast and easy extra-class medium of communication between students and their teachers, whereby teachers can overcome the problem of lack of time to give the needed feedback to students, and learners can in their turn come to grips with their shyness to ask questions in the classroom.

Male students need to be more motivated to learn and more stimulated to employ a variety of LLS. This can be

done through strategic teaching; strategic teachers can foster the ability of male students and also female students to engage in strategic learning. Jones and his colleagues [29] describe strategic teaching as the instructional processes that may result in fostering student thinking, they consider strategic teaching and strategic learning as closely related or linked. Strategic teachers have an understanding of the different learning variables and are conscious of the cognitive requirements of learning. In other words, strategic learning can be the result or the outcome of effective strategic teaching. Strategic teachers should act as thinkers, decision makers, models and mediators of instruction in addition to knowledge transmitters. Strategic teachers also need to consider certain variables in order to develop effective instruction, these variables include characteristics of the student, learning strategies, learning goals, and the materials to be learned.

6. Conclusion

The present research was meant to shed light on the language learning strategies used by a group of EFL Algerian University LMD students. The results showed that University students, irrespective of their year of study, do use LLS but with differences in type and frequency. The study revealed that higher level, third-year students made highly frequent use of a vast number of language learning strategies than the novice, inexperienced first-year students. When compared with the strategies favored by the lower level, first-year students, the strategies typical of higher level students appeared to be more complex, they relied more on the cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Whereas first-year students most used strategy type was the compensation type. As a conclusion, we can say that first-year university students do not make an extensive use of language learning strategies, mainly the metacognitive ones. This low metacognitive strategy use prevents them from being autonomous, more responsible, self-directed learners and setting for themselves accurate, achievable learning goals. Absence or lack of metacognitive knowledge can also restrain students form effectively grasping the content of their courses. Teachers need to enhance their students' metacognition through a diversity of functions like planning, controlling and monitoring. They need to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses and evaluate their daily learning to be able to progress and find a remedial solution of it through teachers' assistance and their own efforts. It is also necessary to assess and evaluate the teaching programs of different courses taught under the LMD system to fit the students' needs, mainly the first-year students' needs, in terms of course content, language proficiency and appropriate language learning strategies that may lead to the development of effective metacognitive knowledge and abilities.

7. Limitations of the study

This paper is hoped to be a positive contribution to the improvement of the EFL teaching /learning in the University of Algiers 2. However, this study has encountered some difficulties and limitations that must be mentioned. First, the sample of 56 students from each level is limited. Therefore, this small sample is not representative of all EFL students enrolled at the University of Algiers 2. Besides, we did not aim at generalizing the findings of the present research. On the contrary, we insist on the fact that we do not strive at generalizing the obtained results, and these are proper to the sample being investigated. Second, we were unable to gather an equal number of females and males among the participants in this study. This task proved to be a hard one because of the limited number of male students compared to the number of female students, in the

English Department. However, the number of the male informants participating in the study is to some degree representative (25 students, i.e. 22% of the total number are males). Third, students' learning styles as a variable that might affect strategy use had not been investigated in the present study.

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Appendix A

Background Questionnaire

Student Code : S….

1.   Age: …………..
2.   Sex …………………………..
3.   How long have you been studying English?

……………………………………………………………………….

4.   How do you rate your proficiency in English compared with other students in your class?

Excellent □   Good □   Fair □   Poor □

5.   What other languages have you studied?

       French   □   Spanish   □   German □   Other   □

6.   Why do you want to study English? (You can tick more than one box)

Interested in the language   □

Interested in the culture   □

Have friends who speak the language   □

Need it for my future career   □

Need it for travel□

Other (explain)

……
……

Appendix B

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

Student code: ……….

Directions

This form of the STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (SILL) is for students of English as a second or foreign language. You will find statements about learning English. Please read each statement and tick the response (1, 2, or 3) that tells US WHETHER YOU OFTEN USE A GIVEN STRATEGY (1) OR SOMETIMES (2) USING IT OR NEVER (3)

     1. Often

     2. Sometimes

     3. Never

Answer in terms of <u>how well the statement describes you</u>. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. <u>There are no right or wrong answers to these statements</u>.

Table 6

THE STRATEGIES	OFTEN (1)	SOMETIMES (2)	NEVER (3)
PART A: <u>MEMORY STRATEGIES</u>			
Q1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English			
Q2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember			
Q3. I connect the sound of a new English and an image of the word to help me remember the word			
Q4. I remember a new word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used			
Q5. I use rhymes to remember new English words			
Q6. I use flashcards to remember new English words			
Q7. I physically act out new English words			
Q8. I review English lessons often			
Q9. I remember new words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board…			
PART B: <u>COGNITIVE STRATEGIES</u>			
Q10. I say or write new English words several times			
Q11. I try to talk like native English speakers.			
Q12. I practice the sounds of English.			
Q13. I use the English words I know in different ways.			
Q14. I start conversations in English.			
Q15. I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English			

Q16. I read for pleasure in English			
Q17. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English			
Q18. I first skim an English passage (read it quickly) then go back and read carefully.			
Q19. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.			
Q20. I try to find patterns in English.			
Q21. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.			
Q22. I try not to translate word-for-word.			
Q23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.			
PART C: COMPENSATION STRATEGIES			
Q24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.			
Q25. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.			
Q26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.			
Q27. I read English without looking up every new word.			
Q28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.			
Q29. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.			
PART D: METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES			
Q30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.			
Q31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.			
Q32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.			
Q33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.			
Q34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.			
Q35. I look for people I can talk to in English			
Q36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.			
Q37. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.			
Q38. I think about my progress in learning English.			
PART E: AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES			
Q39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.			
Q40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.			
Q41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.			

Q42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English			
Q43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.			
Q44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English			
PART F: SOCIAL STRATEGIES			
Q45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again.			
Q46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.			
Q47. I practice English with other students.			
Q48. I ask for help from English speakers.			
Q49. I ask questions in English.			
Q50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.			