An Investigation of Language Learning Strategies Used By Omani EFL Learners

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Introduction

It's quite common for an EFL/ESL teacher to complain about the unsatisfactory language performance of L2 learners.A lot of researchers in the field of EFL/ESL teaching and learning tried to find out the causes of this problem, and also came up with some solutionsthat can assist the learning process.Since the early seventies, the interest of English language teachers has shifted from the methods of language teaching to learners and learning strategies. The research, since then, has mostly focussed on learner-centered approaches to second language teaching. This change is an attempt to guide learners towards autonomy in language learning (Reiss, 1985; Wenden, 1991). Researchers such as Stern (1975), Rubin (1975), etc., establishedthat a successful language learner employs some strategies to facilitate learning the second language. They have also mentioned some characteristics of a 'good language learner'.Consequently, language learning strategies have been thought of as a means of achieving learners' autonomy in the process of language learning. (Oxford,1990; Benson and Voller, 1997).

A learner has to be in control of the way he/she learns in order to be successful in learning a language (Rubin and Thompson, 1994). Many researchers on English language teaching and learning have proved conclusively that language learning strategies have helped language learners solve their learning problems and become fast, effective and successful learners. (Wenden and Rubin, 1987; O'Malley &Chamot, 1990; Chamot and O'Malley, 1994; Oxford, 1996, Cohen, 1998). A lot of researchers showed that more proficient language learners use more types of language learning strategies compared with less proficient learners (Altan, 2003; Bruen, 2001; Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999; Green & Oxford, 1995; O"Malley & Chamot, 1990; Rubin, 1975, 1981; Stern, 1983; Wharton, 2000). Many researchers have hypothesized and proved that less successful learners become more effective and independent learners if learning strategies are taught to them.

Significance of the problem

Oman's educational system is divided into two cycles: Ten years of Basic education and two years of Post-basic education (http://www.moe.gov.om). Most of the students start learning English in their primary school and continue through their secondary school. However, in spite of studying English for relatively a long time, the level of students' English is not up to the required standard. A lot of students face problems in almost every communication skill. There are many reasons that can be attributed to thissuch as lack of exposure to the language outside the classroom,

content of the textbooks, paying more attention to grammar-based teaching than to the language use, methodology, system of evaluation, etc.

English has been taught as a foreign language in the Sultanate of Oman since the 1970s.   Oman has implemented Foundation Program in all colleges and universities to bring a reform which is meant to give more exposure to students in learning English and to provide them a variety of interactive and motivating language learning experiences.   Qualifying the Foundation Program is the minimum requirement for a student to take courses in college/university.   Students enter tertiary education after learning English for almost 10 years.

However, decreasing levels of proficiency among the students is a major concern for any teacher.   When students don't attain the desired levels of proficiency and when there is a huge gap between high achievers and low achievers in a mixed ability class, teachers have a responsibility to investigate what causes this and find ways to improve it and lessen the gap. Chamot (1987:71) is of the opinion that "If learning is to take place, it usually involves the collaboration of two people -- a teacher and a learner." Therefore, it is of utmost importance to become acquainted with different factors such as learner styles, learning strategies, etc to help learner in the acquisition of a language. One of the ways to improve students' proficiency is to teach them the use of appropriate language learning strategies. Many theories and research on language learning strategies have proved that using appropriate language learning strategies will help students have a positive attitude towards learning, have high levels of motivation and develop self-efficacy and reduce anxiety. Therefore, it goes without saying that lack of knowledge of these strategies or lack of using such strategies always keeps some students at a lower level than students who use them effectively.

This study was conducted to examine these language learning strategies used by Level 4 students of the Foundation Program at Nizwa College of Technology.This paper mainly deals with three aspects of these strategies:

- The study talks about the overall use of language learning strategies used by level 4 learners of NCT.
- It also focusses on the differences in the strategy use according to gender, and between high and low English proficiency students.
- It also focusses on the relationship between the use of strategies and performance in the exams.

Literature review: Definition of learning strategies

There are various definitions of language learning strategies that have been given by various researchers. Oxford (1990) defines Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) "steps taken by students to enhance their own learning." These strategies,

according to her, make learning more successful, enjoyable and faster. They are tools for "active, self-directed involvement" and develop communicative competence. Using these strategies appropriately improves learners' proficiency and gives them more self-confidence.

Apart from Oxford, there have been plenty of researchers who have given various definitions of learning strategies. Stern (1983) defined language learning strategies as "generaltendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by the language learner, leaving techniques as the term to refer to particular forms of observable learning behaviour." Weinstein & Mayer (1986) defined learning strategies as "the behaviours and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning that are intended to influence the learner's encoding process." According to Rubin (1987), Learning strategies "contribute to the development of the language system which learner constructs and affect learning directly."

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) also present learning strategies as important contributors to language learning. Wenden and Rubin (1987:19) define learning strategies as "any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information. "Chamot and Kupper (1989: 13) defined learning strategies as "techniques which students use to comprehend, store, and remember new information and skills. What a student thinks and how a student acts in order to learn comprise the non-observable and observable aspects of learning strategies "

Stern (1992:261) believes that "the concept of learning strategy is dependent on the assumption that learners consciously engage in activities to achieve certain goals and learning strategies can be regarded as broadly conceived intentional directions and learning techniques." Cohen (1995:1) argues that all these definitions encompass those actions that are clearly aimed at language learning, as well as those that may well lead to learning but which do not ostensibly have learning as their primary goal." Finally Scott Thornbury (2006:115) defines learning strategies as "techniques or behaviours that learners consciously apply in order to enhance their learning".
The definitions of language learning strategies may be different but all those definitions are consistent in the fact that language learning strategies help learners make their language learning easier and acquire language more efficiently.

Classification of learning strategies

There is no consistent and commonly used classification of language learning strategies. Different researchers have classified language learning strategies into different categories.

According to Rubin (1987), there are there are three types of strategies used by learners that contribute directly or indirectly to language learning. They are learning

strategies (cognitive and metacognitive), communication strategies (less directly related to language learning), and social strategies (contribute indirectly to learning). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) divided LLSs into three major types: cognitive (repetition, resourcing, translation, grouping, note taking, deduction, etc.), metacognitive (organizing, directed attention, selective attention, self-management, planning, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, etc.), and social-affective (cooperation, questioning for clarification, etc).

Stern (1992) mentioned five language learning strategies. These are management and planning strategies (learner's intention to direct his own learning), cognitive strategies (guessing, inductive referencing, memorization, monitoring, etc.), communicative - experiential strategies (to avoid interrupting the flow of communication, for e.g., circumlocution, gesturing, asking for repetition and explanation, etc.), interpersonal strategies (monitoring their own development and evaluating their own performance), and affective strategies (solving emotional difficulties).

Cohen (1998) named four language learning strategy types. They are cognitive (identification, grouping, retention and storage of language material, etc.), metacognitive (pre-assessment, pre-planning on-line planning and evaluation and post-evaluation of language learning activities), affective (to regulate emotions, motivation and attitudes such as reducing anxiety and self-encouragement, etc.) and social strategies (actions the learner chooses to take in order to interact with other learners or native speakers of the language).

Oxford's classification of learning strategies encompasses all aspects of strategy use and is the most comprehensive classification to date (Ellis, 1994). Its reliability and validity have been widely accepted (Oxford, 1992). It has further been validated by Hsiao and Oxford (2002) through factor analysis measures and has proved to be the most valid classification of language learning strategies. In the present study, Oxford's classification, which is most widely used, is adopted because of its comprehensiveness. According to Rebecca Oxford (1990), language learning strategies can be divided into two types: direct learning strategies and indirect learning strategies. These are, further, subdivided into six groupsfor assessment: Memory strategies (9 items), cognitive strategies (14 items), compensation strategies (6 items), metacognitive strategies (9 items), affective strategies (6 items), and social strategies (6 items). Detailed classification is shown in Appendix 1.

Memory strategies are those used to create mental linkages, to apply images and sounds, to review well and to employ action. Cognitive strategies are the mental strategies learners use to analyse and make sense of their learning. These strategies are also used when practising, receiving and sending messages, and creating structure for input and output. Compensation strategies help learners to deal with knowledge gaps successfully by guessing intelligently and to continue the communication.

Metacognitive strategies help learners to arrange, plan, evaluate and control their learning. Affective strategies lower learners' anxiety and also deal with learner's emotional difficulties. Finally social strategies allow them to have greater interaction with the target language.

Research on learning strategies in Oman

In Omani context, different studies related to language learning strategies have been conducted by various researchers. Mahmoud Suleiman Al-Harrasi examined the oral communication strategies used by learners, Rashid Hamed Al-Azri worked on vocabulary strategies and Azhar & Rahma worked on the influence of gender on Omani students' LLSs, comprehension and motivation. In this study, the results indicated that there are differences between males and females with regard to language learning strategies, language comprehension and language learning motivation. It was found that females exercise more number of, and also different types of language learning strategies, especially memory and social strategies, when compared with males.It is worthwhile to mention here a few causes of gender differences in English language learning mentioned by Azhar and Rahma (2012).

One of the causes of gender differences is the environment around the learners. Female students are not encouraged to go out of the house much. As a result, female students feel more responsible and less distracted in their studies.

They are not equal in terms of motivation that determines their self-directed learning. Some attempts have been made to find out the use of language learning strategies by Omani students in Muscat. The situation in NCT is unique in the fact that many students who study at NCT come from very small towns in nearby areas. They don't get many opportunities to interact with speakers of English as the students in Muscat usually do. In spite of the actual educational level they are in, they feel that they lack significant improvement in the language skills.

Therefore, given the uniqueness of the Omani EFL context at NCT, further research is needed to find out the use of language learning strategies of these EFL learners. This study is an attempt to find out their overall use of LLSs, the differences in the strategy use between male and female students and the relationship between the use of LLSs and the performance of students in examinations.

Methodology

Participants and setting

A total of 75 students (both male and female) from Level 4 were asked to participate in this project. Ratio of gender was: 44 female participants (58.7%), and 31 male participants (41.3%). The ratio of females was high because there were more

female students in the classes and the questionnaires were distributed to the whole class without considering the male/female ratio. Their ages ranged between 18 and 20. Most of the students have studied English for almost 10 years.

As for the language proficiency, all the participants qualified level 3 (Intermediate) exam in their Foundation Program and were studying level 4 (advanced). Therefore, they can be categorized as advanced EFL learners in Oman. In terms of self-rated language proficiency compared with other Omani classmates, 67% of the participants rated themselves as good, 27% rated themselves as being fair and the other 6% rated themselves as excellent. As for the self-rated proficiency compared with native speakers of English, 57% of the subjects rated themselves as fair, nearly 35 % rated as poor and only 8% rated themselves as good. No one has rated themselves as excellent compared with native speakers. On the whole, the information revealed here is that majority of the participants in this study are not quite confident with their English language ability.

As for the importance of language learning, nearly 90% of the participants indicated that learning English is very important and the remaining 10% indicated that it is important to them. They wanted to learn English because of their interests in the language, in the culture, and/or they need it for their future career. In spite of their awareness of the importance of the language learning, the students feel that their English language ability is not up to the standard that they want to be actually in.

Instrument

This study adopted the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL version 7.0 for ESL/EFL learners) by Oxford(1990) as a quantitative research method to gather the statistical data (samples' use of language learning strategies). SILL asks learners about the frequency of their use of 50 common strategies. It has a Likert-scale format: learners were asked to report their perceived use of language learning strategies on a scale of one to five to explain how often they use each strategy. The choices are: never, rarely, sometimes, usually and always or almost always. By means of a background questionnaire, general information about participants was taken to understand how long they have been studying English, what their proficiency level is, etc. The reliability and validity of SILL have been extensively assessed in a large number of studies (including more than a dozen dissertations) in a wide range of contexts. Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) provide a detailed review of the results. SILL has consistently scored above .90 using Cronbach alpha, indicating high internal reliability. It's the most extensively used instrument in investigating EFL learners' use of language learning strategies. Language learning strategies, according to the SILL, are divided into six groups for assessment, as mentioned earlier. Oxford (1990) developed scale ranges and identified different levels of usage as: (1) "high usage": 3.5-5.0, (2) "medium usage": 2.5-3.4, and (3) "low usage": 1.0-2.4.

Data collection and analysis procedures

The SILL and background questionnaires were administered to 75 level 4 (advanced) students in their class hours in the third semester of the academic year 2012-13. As this study also investigated the relationship between their use of strategies and performance, it was important to determine the students' English proficiency level. Students' proficiency levels were determined according to their marks in the mid-term exam in this semester. Students' with 75% and above will be termed as having high proficiency level, students with 60% and below will be in low proficiency level and others in medium level.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics 20) for Microsoft Windows was used to analyze the collected data. Descriptive statistics (min, max, mean and standard deviation) were performed in order to gather the demographic data of the participants and to calculate their overall strategy use. In addition, independent t-tests were performed to figure out whether there are significant differences in strategy use according to the gender and the relationship between use of strategies and performance in the exam. Finally, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the strategy use and performance in the exam.

Analysis and results

What are the overall language learning strategies used by the students in learning English? What are the most commonly used strategies? What are the least used strategies?

Overall strategy use

From the descriptive statistics analysis, Table 1 illustrates the overall use of strategies by participants. The mean of overall strategy use was 3.0725. The score indicates that participants exercise medium use (2.5-3.4) of LLSs in learning English.

Table 1: Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Overall strategy use Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overall Strategies	75	2.30	4.00	3.0725	.36513
Valid N (listwise)	75				

Individual strategy use by participants

The results indicated in Table 2 are the use of individual strategies by all participants. According to this table, we understand that participants are moderate users of all these strategies with no much difference between any two strategies. If we take all the participants together, the mean varies from 3.011 to 3.113. This table also

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indicates that the most frequently used strategies were cognitive strategies (M=3.1131), followed by metacognitive strategies (M=3.09), compensation strategies (M=3.084), social strategies (M=3.07), memory strategies (M=3.025) and affective strategies (M=3.011).

Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Statistics for individual strategy use by participants

	N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation	Rank
Memory Strategies	75	3.0248	1.89	3.89	.41819	5
Cognitive Strategies	75	3.1131	2.21	4.00	.40593	1
Compensation Strategies	75	3.0841	2.00	4.50	.55953	3
Metacognitive Strategies	75	3.0900	2.00	4.22	.50292	2
Affective Strategies	75	3.0111	1.67	4.17	.49033	6
Social Strategies	75	3.0708	2.17	4.33	.45560	4
Valid N (listwise)	75					

Does gender have any role in the use of Language Learning Strategies among these learners? What is the difference in the strategy use between males and females? Do males and females use the same amount of language learning strategies?

Gender and the use of LLSs

This part of the research is more interesting as it has revealed a lot of crucial information as far as the learning strategies are concerned. From the descriptive statistics for strategies according to gender, Table 3 and 4 illustrate that there is a significant difference in the use of LLSs between males and females for any subcategory, and females reported significantly higher use of all six strategy categories than did males.

The females in the present study were slightly better in using metacognitive and cognitive strategies whereas males were slightly better in social and affective strategies. The least used strategies by females were affective strategies whereas that of males were metacognitive and compensation strategies. Therefore, we can say that there is a great difference in the preference of strategies between males and females. From these tables, we understand that there is a significant difference between males and females in the use of individual strategies and the mean for femalesvaries from 3.114 to 3.311, whereas for males, the mean varies from 2.785 to 2.983. Precisely, the mean, according to Table 5, for females' use of overall strategies was 3.232 and the mean for males' use of overall strategies was 2.8452. According to Table 5, overall mean differences indicated that female participants used more LLSs than male participants in this study.

Table 3: Summary of Descriptive Statistics for individual strategy use by females

Descriptive Statistics[a]

	N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation
Overall Strategies	44	3.2327	2.62	4.00	.28106
Memory Strategies	44	3.1634	2.00	3.89	.35091
Cognitive Strategies	44	3.2968	2.57	4.00	.33507
Compensation Strategies	44	3.2950	2.00	4.50	.56429
Metacognitive Strategies	44	3.3050	2.44	4.22	.40529
Affective Strategies	44	3.1139	1.67	4.17	.49696
Social Strategies	44	3.1323	2.33	4.33	.42583
Valid N (listwise)	44				

Gender: female

Table 4: Summary of Descriptive Statistics for individual strategy use by males

Descriptive Statistics[a]

	N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation
Overall Strategies	31	2.8452	2.30	3.84	.35293
Memory Strategies	31	2.8281	1.89	3.78	.43208
Cognitive Strategies	31	2.8523	2.21	3.57	.35458
Compensation Strategies	31	2.7848	2.17	3.50	.39757
Metacognitive Strategies	31	2.7848	2.00	4.22	.47373
Affective Strategies	31	2.8652	2.00	4.17	.44895
Social Strategies	31	2.9835	2.17	4.00	.48856
Valid N (listwise)	31				

Gender = Male

Table 5: Summary of Group Statistics for overall strategy use by males and females

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall Strategies	Female	44	3.2327	.28106	.04237
	Male	31	2.8452	.35293	.06339

Independent Samples Test to determine the difference in the overall strategy use between males and females.

To determine the differences in gender in relation to the LLSs, independent t-test was performed. The result of the analysis (Table 6) showed that there is a significant difference between male and female participants in their overall LLSs use. The results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there is a significant difference in the overall strategy use between male and female students as the significant 'p' value is less than 0.00 which is less than 0.05.

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Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Overall Strategies	Equal variances assumed	1.936	.168	5.287	73	.000	.38757	.07330	.24147	.53366
	Equal variances not assumed			5.083	55.121	.000	.38757	.07625	.23477	.54036

Independent Samples test to determine the difference in performance between males and females in the exams.

The analysis of the independent t-test is done in two steps. At first, the homogeneity of the variance between the male and female participants was determined using Levene's Test for Equality of Variances. In the current analysis, the Sig. value was .079, which was greater than .05. Therefore, variances were assumed to be equal. As a result, it was possible to test the hypothesis using the t-test row of results "Equal Variances Assumed" in Table 7. This provided the degrees of freedom (df=73). From the table below, it is also observed that significance was .000, which was lower than .05. Consequently, it can be concluded that statistically there is a significant difference between males and females according to their midterm averages. Females had a higher average (M=74.1) than males (M=60.5) in their midterm exams. (See Table 8).

Table 7: Summary of Independent Samples Test to determine the difference in the strategy use and midterm marks.

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
									Lower	Upper	
MidtermMarks	Equal variances assumed	3.167	.079	5.725	73	.000	13.52559	2.36265	8.81684	18.23434	
	Equal variances not assumed			5.464	53.336	.000	13.52559	2.47557	8.56095	18.49023	

Table 8: Summary of Group statistics to determine the difference in the strategy use and the mean of the grades that they achieved.

Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Exam Marks	Female	44	74.0159	8.84757	1.33382
	Male	31	60.4903	11.61167	2.08552

Is there a relation between students' performance in the exams and their overall language learning strategy use?

The Pearson Correlation test was performed to find out if there is any significant difference between the strategy use and the performance in the exams. It was found out that the value of p is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. Therefore we can say that the correlations are statistically significant. We can conclude that there is a significant difference between the strategy use and the performance of students in the exams. (See Table 9).

Table 9: Pearson Correlation Test to determine the relationship between the strategy use and performance in the exam.

Correlation

		Overall Strategies	Performance
Overall Strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	.732**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	75	75
Performance	Pearson Correlation	.732**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	75	75

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

Discussion of the findings

These participants are moderate users of all these language learning strategies. Our research results indicated that these students are medium strategy users with the average mean score of 3.072.   If we take all the participants together, there is no much difference between any two strategies. It appeared that students' range of strategies is very limited. It might be because either they were not aware of such strategies or they had never received any training on strategy use. As a significant difference has been found out between the use of strategies between males and females, it is worthwhile to discuss more about those findings.

Of the six sub-categories listed in Oxford's (1990) SILL, social strategies were used most frequently by males followed by affective strategies. Surprisingly these two were the least used strategies by females. Metacognitive strategies were used most often by females followed by cognitive strategies. Metacognitive and compensation strategies werereported to be the least frequently used strategies by males. We understand that metacognitive strategies such as organizing work, managing time, cognitive strategies such as looking for patterns, etc. are not the strategies that most of the male students preferred.

Strategies most preferred and least preferred by female participants:

Meta-cognitive strategies, such as trying to find out how to be a better learner of English, paying attention when someone is speaking English, and noticing mistakes and using that information to become better, were reported to be the most frequent strategies used by female participants. Among other strategies, cognitive strategies such as analysing and reasoning, and practising, memory strategies such as associating, remembering and reviewing English lessons were used by female students.   The majority of them preferred to use gestures, synonyms and guess unfamiliar words. These are the most favoured compensation strategies. Females reported that they use social and affective strategies rarely. When they used these strategies, it was for encouraging themselves, to lower their anxiety and asking help

from speakers of English. Writing down their feelings in a language learning diary, using flashcards to remember new English words, looking for opportunities to read, and reading for pleasure are the least preferred strategies. It appeared that females seem to use these strategies very infrequently.

Strategies most preferred and least preferred by male participants:

On the other hand, male participants used social and affective strategies more frequently. They have reported that they prefer social strategies, for example, asking help from English speakers, asking other people to slow down when they don't understand. Encouraging themselves to speak even when they're afraid of making a mistake is the most preferred affective strategy followed by noticing their tension and lowering it. Among the other strategies, memory strategies such as creating mental linkages, associating, cognitive strategies such as watching English language movies, finding out similar words in their own language to convey their meaning, compensation strategies such as using gestures, guesses were the most preferred strategies by male participants. Surprisingly, the most preferred strategies by females are the least preferred strategies by males, i.e., metacognitive strategies. Writing down their feelings in a language learning diary, finding out meanings by dividing a long word into parts, planning their schedule, guessing and looking for opportunities to read, and reading for pleasure are the least preferred strategies. Metacognitive and cognitive strategies were reported to be used very rarely by male participants.

The learning strategies investigated in this study are by no means comprehensive. This study has been different in some areas from previous research because of the difference in subjects and their sharp differences in the use of strategies according to gender.   Female students reported employing language learning strategies more frequently than their male counterparts. We have also been able to understand that gender factors in individual strategy use.   Female students were using more metacognitive and cognitive strategies where male students preferred social and affective strategies. It's worthwhile to mention here that these "gender differences in English language learning cannot be attributed to social and cultural reasons as Omani society provides equal opportunities for both genders to learn English" (Azhar and Rahma, 2012).And the differences in the use of strategies might be another factor why female students fare better in classes and in exams.

During the lectures, it was shown in the classroom by displaying the strategies that their peers use and its relationship to their performance in exams. It definitely encouraged a little discussion among students. It also made some students use these strategies in the tasks that followed this discussion. There was certainly a clear change in the way students remembered these strategies and tried to complete different tasks during the semester. Incorporating strategy instruction has certainly made a difference in the attitude of students. David Nunan (1996, 1997) provided a fundamental reason for integrating explicit instruction of language learning strategies

into the curriculum. He is of the opinion that it has dual focus: teachers should try to develop language content and also learning processes (1996, p.41). Such instruction not only increases learners' awareness of strategies but also allows them to choose suitable strategies to achieve their learning goals.

Pedagogical implications

This study proposes the following implications for EFL teachers in the foundation program in colleges of technology.

Language teachers should be aware of different abilities of learners, their intelligence and their strategy use. Teachers should also have knowledge of learning strategies which they can use to train students to use a wide range of strategies to become better learners. At the same time, learners also should be cognisant of the significance of language learning strategies.

Language teachers should also know their students' language learning experiences, their self-rating proficiency, and their perception towards the teacher's teaching method and the required outcomes of the syllabus.

Language teachers can find out their students' preference for strategy use regarding learning English by asking students to name the strategies they use most often and least often. This information can help teachers implement strategy instruction.

The findings have significant implications for classroom instruction, materials design and teacher preparation. Research on LLSs has consistently shown that the most effective strategy instruction occurs when it is integrated into regular classroom instruction (Cohen, 1998; Oxford & Leaver, 1996).

The researchers believe that if these strategies are incorporated in the lessons appropriately, students could rise above the present level and become better language learners.Language learning strategies can certainly make students overcome their inadequacies that they have in learning English.

Using different methods, such as integrating teaching with technology, using multi-media might develop students' interest in the learning.

Limitations of the Study and suggestions for further research:

First of all, this study is based on EFL classroom in a foundation program in Nizwa and the selected students might not be able to provide the qualitative data support for any conclusive findings that may be directly representative of the whole Omani student population. However, the results obtained from the selected sample in

this study can provide some useful insights in encouraging the use of language learning strategies among EFL learners. Despite the limited availability of time, the researchers have taken some measures to make students use language learning strategies appropriately during the course of study.

Secondly, the time we got to observe students was very less as the length of the term is just three months after which students go to post-foundation programs.

Finally, it would also be difficult to monitor students to know how they are going to improve their strategy use in their further study at NCT. Therefore, it is essential to do a detailed study to know whether these strategies are actually being practised in language learning.

A study with bigger scope would hopefully bring about a better picture of students' use of language learning strategies. Strategy instruction might also be an interest area for later studies. Future researchers could come up with more detailed frameworks and procedures for strategy instruction. Evaluating the effectiveness of specific categories or strategies is also an option for further researchers.

Conclusion

Language learning is a skill that keeps evolving continuously. We learn new things every day and always there is a scope for improvement. So, we can say that a good learner is one who has willingness to try new strategies in learning and is always interested in learning how to learn. Students in this study are found out to be moderate users of learning strategies and it shows in their performance in the exams too. Their interest in strategies has certainly increased, and there is a greater need to motivate students to have belief in their abilities to achieve the desired level of proficiency in English. Students with such beliefs are more likely to challenge themselves with difficult tasks and be intrinsically motivated.

It is the responsibility of every teacher to work towards achieving the outcomes of a learning process in its true sense. Although it may be difficult to say whether just language learning strategies would help students become better learners, the researchers believe that teaching learning strategies would certainly put the teachers in an advantageous position. The researchers also support the opinion that language learning strategies must be incorporated in the curriculum as these strategies are designed to make teachers and learners aware of how effectively they can facilitate the language learning process. The researchers would also suggest that teachers should try at least some strategies in every class to make the teaching and learning process more meaningful. It certainly makes the students employ some learning strategies and makes their learning more enjoyable and meaningful. Finally, teachers should highlight the fact that learning would be more enjoyable and effective if there is a sufficient understanding of different kinds of learning strategies.

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APPENDIX –1
Classification of Strategies, Oxford (1990)

DIRECT STRATEGIES

I. Memory

    A. Creating mental linkages
    B. Applying images and sounds
    C. Reviewing well
    D. Employing action

II. Cognitive

    A. Practising
    B. Receiving and sending messages strategies
    C. Analysing and reasoning
    D. Creating structure for input and output

III. Compensation strategies

    A. Guessing intelligently
    B. Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing

INDIRECT STRATEGIES

I. Meta-cognitive Strategies

    A. Centering your learning
    B. Arranging and planning your learning
    C. Evaluating your learning

II. Affective Strategies

    A. Lowering your anxiety
    B. Encouraging yourself
    C. Taking your emotional temperature

III. Social Strategies

    A. Asking questions
    B. Cooperating with others
    C. Emphathising with others

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