



An Investigation of Language Learning Strategies Used by Female Saudi EFL College Students

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Abstract:

Although language learning strategies (LLSs) received considerable amount of attention since 1970s, limited studies have focused on the use of LLSs by ESL students especially EFL students. In order for educators to gain insight into students approach to language learning through the use of LLSs, further research should be conducted about the use of LLSs within various contexts. The current study aims primarily to investigate the LLSs used by Saudi EFL female college students in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and secondly to assess whether any difference exists in terms of LLSs used among students from different universities and university levels. The Strategy Inventory Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire by Oxford (1990b) was used as a research instrument to collect data since it was initially designed to elicit information about LLSs employed by ESL/EFL students. In this study, an adapted version of SILL was used to elicit information about the strategy employed by 145 female Saudi EFL students at three universities. The results showed that the students were in general medium to high users of strategies. The most common strategy was the metacognitive strategy, whereas the least common were the affective and memory strategies. There were no significant differences between LLSs and university levels. The results reflect the students' awareness to manage their own learning since metacognitive strategies refer to learning language through planning, organizing, monitoring and evaluating (Oxford, 1990b). In addition, the low use of affective strategies is likely to be due to fear of making mistakes and being uncomfortable when using English.

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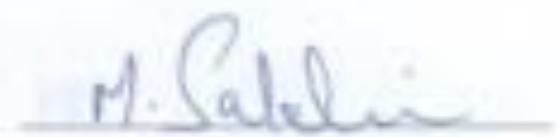
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Abstract

Although language learning strategies (LLSs) received considerable amount of attention since 1970s, limited studies have focused on the use of LLSs by ESL students especially EFL students. In order for educators to gain insight into students approach to language learning through the use of LLSs, further research should be conducted about the use of LLSs within various contexts. The current study aims primarily to investigate the LLSs used by Saudi EFL female college students in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and secondly to assess whether any difference exists in terms of LLSs used among students from different universities and university levels. The Strategy Inventory Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire by Oxford (1990b) was used as a research instrument to collect data since it was initially designed to elicit information about LLSs employed by ESL/EFL students. In this study, an adapted version of SILL was used to elicit information about the strategy employed by 145 female Saudi EFL students at three universities. The results showed that the students were in general medium to high users of strategies. The most common strategy was the metacognitive strategy, whereas the least common were the affective and memory strategies. There were no significant differences between LLSs and university levels. The results reflect the students' awareness to manage their own learning since metacognitive strategies refer to learning language through planning, organizing, monitoring and evaluating (Oxford, 1990b). In addition, the low use of affective strategies is likely to be due to fear of making mistakes and being uncomfortable when using English.

Keywords: EFL, female learners, language learning strategies, Saudi Arabia, university.

ملخص البحث

على الرغم من أن استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة الانجليزية تلقت قدرا كبيرا من الاهتمام منذ 1970s، دراسات محدودة ركزت على استخدام استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة الانجليزية من قبل الطلاب المتعلمين للغة الانجليزية كلفه ثانيه وخصوصا طلاب المتعلمين للغة الانجليزية كلفه اجنبيه. من أجل اكساب المعلمين نظرة ثاقبة لنهج الطلاب على تعلم اللغة من خلال استخدام LLSs، ينبغي إجراء المزيد من البحوث حول استخدام LLSs ضمن سياقات مختلفة. تهدف الدراسة الحالية في المقام الأول إلى دراسة استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة المستخدمة من قبل طالبات اللغة الانجليزية في الجامعات السعودية بالرياض في المملكة العربية السعودية، وثانيا لتقييم ما إذا كان هنالك أي فرق موجود بين استخدام الطالبات لاستراتيجيات تعلم اللغة في مختلف المستويات و من مختلف الجامعات. تم استخدام الإصدار 7.0 و الذي يُسمى استبانة مخزون استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة (SILL). هذا الاستبيان مقدم من اوكسفورد عام (1990b) كأداة بحثية لجمع البيانات و قد تم تصميمه من البداية للحصول على معلومات حول استخدام طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلفه أجنبيه أو كلفه ثانيه لاستراتيجيات تعلم اللغة. في هذه الدراسة، تم استخدام نسخة معدلة من SILL للحصول على معلومات حول الاستراتيجيات التي استخدمتها 145 طالبة لغة انجليزية سعوديه في ثلاث جامعات سعوديه. وأظهرت النتائج أن معدل استخدام الطالبات لاستراتيجيات تعلم اللغة كانت متوسطة إلى مرتفعه. وكانت الإستراتيجية الأكثر شيوعا هي إستراتيجية الفوق معرفية، في حين أن أقل إستراتيجية شيوعا كانت الوجدانية واستراتيجيات الذاكرة، ومع ذلك، لم تكن هنالك فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة بين المستويات الجامعية المختلفة أو بين الجامعات. و تعكس النتائج وعي الطالبات بالإدارة التعليمية الخاصة بهم، نظرا لأن استراتيجيات الفوق معرفية تشير إلى تعلم اللغة من خلال التخطيط والتنظيم و المراقبة والتقييم (أكسفورد، 1990b). وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن قلة استخدام استراتيجيات الوجدانية يعكس خوف الطلاب من الوقوع في الخطأ، الذي يمنهم من المحاولة لأنهم لا يشعرون بالاسترخاء عندما يتحدثون اللغة الانجليزية.

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Chapter I

Introduction

In recent years, the topic of language learning strategies is considered an important area of research in language learning (MacIntyre, 1994). With the shift of focus from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered environment in the 1970s, great attention has been brought to the field of language learning strategies (LLSs) (Kamarul et al., 2009; Al-Otaibi, 2004). As a result, such studies have recently increased since language learning strategies generally play a significant role in language learning and specifically in second and foreign language acquisition (MacIntyre, 1994).

Language learning strategies (LLSs) have been defined as certain behaviors, actions or techniques that learners employ in order to learn the input, comprehension and output of the target language (Oxford, 1990b). Understanding language processes and learner development in a foreign or second language depends heavily on LLSs (Ellis, 1994). Thus, Ellis (1994) believes that LLSs are among the crucial factors in exploring second language acquisition. According to Stern (1983), LLSs are significant and crucial "mental operations" in the process of learning a second language. Learner's achievement and proficiency are linked to LLSs (Sung, 2011).

LLSs is a lifelong learning approach (Al-Otaibi, 2004). The use of LLSs promotes learner autonomy (Mlstar, 2001). Language learning can be an enjoyable experience if learners get used to applying these strategies to language learning as techniques to overcome language barriers (Zare, 2012). As a result, learners improve their language skills and create a learning approach that is self-directed and independent even beyond the classroom experience (Zare, 2012). According to Nunan (1988), learners should be equipped with effective learning strategies

in order to promote learner autonomy and to help learners choose the direction of their own learning.

Although language learning strategies are employed by all language learners, language learners vary a great deal in strategy choice and frequency of use (Chamot & Kupper, 1999). In a second or foreign language, language learners vary in terms of successful language learning and individual learning behavior (Yang, 2010). These inconsistencies between language learners can be attributed to the different use of LLSs. ESL/EFL student use LLSs to develop their English language (Yang, 2010). According to (Chamot & Kupper, 1999), successful language learners employ specific types of LLSs based on their language learning requirements. Nevertheless, many studies indicate that several factor influence LLSs use and choice, including gender, proficiency, motivation, personality, language, and learning styles. The present study investigates the use of LLSs by Saudi female EFL learners.

Statement of the Problem

In the extant literature, there is a lack of research on LLSs use by EFL students. In the Arab world, there are few studies (e.g., Diab, 2000; Abu Shmais, 2003; El-Dib, 2004; Khalil, 2005; Al-Buainain, 2010; Al-Jabali, 2012) that focus on the use of LLSs by EFL students. In addition, according to Abu Radwan (2011) and Al-Buainain (2010), Al-Otaibi (2004) is the only study that investigates the use of LLSs by Saudi EFL students in Saudi Arabia.

Although LLSs play a significant role in understanding individual differences between students, most teachers do not fully understand students' use and knowledge of LLSs (Park, 1997). Both EFL teachers and students should be aware of LLSs for the success of language

learning (Al-Otaibi, 2004; Al-Natour, 2012). Therefore, the current study attempts to investigate LLSs employed by Saudi female EFL college students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study is twofold. First, it aims to investigate LLSs used by Saudi female EFL college students in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Second, it aims to identify whether there is any difference in LLS use among students from different universities and university levels.

Research Questions:

The present study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What strategies are used by learners at three proficiency levels?
2. To what extent does the university attended by the participants affect the strategy use?
3. What are the differences if any that learners exhibit at each proficiency level?

Significance of the Study

Most studies about LLSs have been conducted with ESL students, and very few with EFL students. Thus, it is crucial to replicate language learning studies in various contexts in order not to fall a victim to what Wharton (2000) calls "the dangers of an ethnocentric bias regarding the definition of good language learning strategies" (p. 204). This study has been conducted in the Saudi EFL context, so curriculum designers and teachers within that context can gain insight into how students approach language learning through students' use of LLSs. Oxford (1994) stressed that further research should investigate the use of LLSs in various learning environments:

Research should be replicated so more consistent information becomes available within and across groups of learners. Particularly important is information on how students from different cultural backgrounds use language learning strategies. L2 teachers need to feel confident that the research is applicable to their students.

The significance of this study is twofold: theoretical and practical. First, from a theoretical perspective, the study tries to ascertain whether a relationship exists between LLS and university level in a context that has never been investigated before.

Second, the practical significance of the study relates to language learning pedagogy. The results of the current study can provide teachers and educators with a clearer picture of how language learning occurs. The findings will inform teachers and educators about which LLSs students used most and least. Successful strategies can be uncovered and taught in order to monitor student learning progress.

Limitation of the Study

The study was limited to:

1. Saudi female EFL college students in universities in Riyadh.
2. English majors at Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Princess Norah bint Abdulrahman University and King Saud University.
3. The relationship between the use of EFL learning strategies (LLSs) and university level.

7. Definition of Related Terms:

7.1. English as a foreign language (EFL):

In a country where the English is not commonly used in the context of education, government or business, it is considered a foreign language (Brown, 2007).

7.2. Language Learning Strategies

According to Oxford (1990b), language learning strategies are certain behaviors, action or techniques that learners employ in order to learn the input, comprehension and output of the target language in order to make learning more enjoyable, fast and effective. In this study, certain techniques are used by Saudi female EFL college students to improve their English language learning.

Oxford (1990b) classified learning strategies into the following six categories:

7.2.1. Direct Strategies

7.2.1.1. Memory Strategies:

Memory strategies are direct strategies that include grouping techniques, the use of imagery, and the making of mental links or associations. This approach helps learners to retrieve and store information (Oxford, 1990b).

7.2.1.2. Cognitive Strategies:

Cognitive strategies are direct strategies that help learners to understand and produce the target language. They include summarizing, reasoning, analyzing, taking notes, skimming and scanning and transferring knowledge of words from one language to another (Oxford, 1990b).

7.2.1.3. Compensation strategies:

Compensation strategies are direct strategies that allow learners to use language to make up for gaps in the target language. They include guessing and the use of gestures and synonyms (Oxford, 1990b).

7.2.2. Indirect Strategies

7.2.2.4. Metacognitive Strategies:

Metacognitive strategies are indirect strategies which help learners to coordinate the process of their learning, such as arranging, planning, organizing and evaluating learning, setting goals, and paying attention (Oxford, 1990b).

7.2.2.5. Affective Strategies:

Affective strategies are indirect strategies that allow learners to manage and regulate their emotions, attitudes, motivations and values. They include lowering learners' anxiety and encouraging oneself (Oxford, 1990b).

7.2.2.6. Social Strategies:

Social strategies are indirect strategies that help learners to learn a language through communication and interaction with others, such as asking for clarification, cooperation, and empathizing with others as a way of developing an understanding of the target culture (Oxford, 1990b).

Chapter II

Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Language Learning Strategies

Not only can language be aided by learning strategies but so can other subjects, such as chemistry, math, and physics (Hajhashemi, Ghombavani, & Amirkhiz, 2011). Since strategies play an important role in language learning, many researchers have studied and defined LLSs in the field of second or foreign language acquisition (Lee, 2010). However, LLSs have been defined from various different points of view.

Wenden (1987) defined LLSs from three points of view: behavior, such as learning meaning; cognitive theory, such as strategic knowledge learners; and the affective way. According to Rigney (1978) and Rubin (1987), LLSs are techniques or behaviors that promote language learning.

In addition, Oxford (1990b) defined LLSs more specifically. According to Oxford, LLSs are certain behaviors, action or techniques that the learners employ to learn the input, comprehension and output of the target language. These language learning strategies can improve students' language proficiency and self-confidence (Oxford, 1990b). Furthermore, Oxford (1990b, p. 9) delineated 12 features of language learning strategies:

1. They contribute to the main goal – communicative competence;
2. They allow learners to become more self-directed;
3. They expand the role of teachers;
4. They are problem-oriented;

5. They are specific actions taken by the learner;
6. They involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive;
7. They support learning both directly and indirectly;
8. They are not always observable;
9. They are often conscious;
10. They can be taught;
11. They are flexible; and
12. They are influenced by a variety of factors.

However, Skehan (1989, cited in Ferreira, 2004) believes that although there have been a considerable amount of results regarding the use of LLSs by learners, there is not much agreement regarding what these strategies are. Skehan (2002) believes that the concept of learning strategies is ambiguous. Since the term 'strategies' has created some confusion, educational psychologists in the 1990s have simply dropped the word and directed their attention instead toward the foundation of "strategic learning" (Ferreira, 2004). Strategic learning is the contribution of the learners' conscious decision to facilitate the learners' process of learning (Ferreira, 2004). Skehan (2002) introduced the new term 'self-regulation' in order to include this perspective.

2.2 Rebecca's Classification of Language Learning Strategies

The studies of LLSs began in the early seventies and were based on successful language learners (Stern, 1975). In these studies, a number of learning strategies were identified and then applied to successful ESL/EFL learners. These studies have classified LLSs differently.

In 1990, Oxford developed a new classification of LLSs based on earlier studies. It consisted of two types of strategies: direct and indirect. Direct strategies are those where the target language is directly involved (Oxford, 1990b). These include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies, on the other hand, include metacognitive, affective and social strategies. As suggested by its name, indirect strategies do not require direct use of language learning and include such modes as evaluating, planning, managing anxiety and cooperation (1990b, Oxford). These six strategies are explained below.

A. Direct Strategies

1. Memory Strategies (CARE)

- a. Creating mental linkages
- b. Applying images and sounds
- c. Reviewing thoroughly
- d. Employing action

2. Cognitive Strategies (PRAC)

- a. Practicing
- b. Receiving and sending messages
- c. Analyzing and reasoning
- d. Creating structure for input and output

3. Compensation Strategies (GO)

- a. Guessing intelligently
- b. Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing

B. Indirect Strategies

1. Metacognitive Strategies (CAPE)

- a. Centering your learning
- b. Arranging and planning your learning
- c. Evaluating your learning

2. Affective Strategies (LET)

- a. Lowering your anxiety
- b. Encouraging yourself
- c. Taking your emotional temperature

3. Social Strategies (ACE)
 - a. Asking questions
 - b. Cooperating with others
 - c. Empathizing with others

(Oxford, 1990b, p. 17)

These six categories lay the ground rules for Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990b). Based on her categories, Oxford (1990b) developed SILL, which is a valuable instrument for testing the use of strategies by ESL/EFL learners. According to Lee (2010), the comprehensiveness and specificity of Oxford's (1990b) classification of LLSs distinguished it from earlier research.

Numerous studies (Phillips, 1991; Li, 2005; Al-Buainain, 2010) that applied SILL have shown that language proficiency can be greatly influenced by the use of LLSs. For these reasons, this instrument was chosen for this study.

Furthermore, Rivera-Mills and Plonsky (2007) state that SILL is considered the most effective instrument in LLSs. As a result, many studies are done to investigate the factors affecting the use of LLSs and eventually contribute to the area of LLSs (Lee, 2010).

2.3 Factors affecting the use of language learning strategies

Numerous factors affect the use and the choice of learning strategies. Although various researchers have divided these factors differently, they share many similarities. Ellis (1994) divided LLS factors into 3 groups, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) divided them into 7, Skehan (1989) divided them into 4, and Altman (1980) divided them into 12. The following table lists the factors according to each of them.

Table 1

Factors affecting the use of LLSs

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991)	Skehan (1989)	Altman (1980)	Ellis (1994)
1. Age 2. Socio-psychological factors a. motivation b. attitude 3. Personality a. self-esteem b. extroversion c. anxiety d. risk-taking e. sensitivity to rejection f. empathy g. inhibition h. tolerance of ambiguity 4. Cognitive style a. Field independence/independence b. Category width c. Reflexivity/impulsivity d. Aural/visual e. Analytic/gestalt 5. Hemisphere specialization 6. Learning strategies 7. Other factors e.g., memory, sex	1. Language aptitude 2. Motivation 3. LLS 4. Cognitive and affective factors a. extroversion/introversion b. risk-taking c. intelligence d. field independence e. anxiety	1. Age 2. Sex 3. Previous experience with language learning 4. Proficiency in the native language 5. Personality factors 6. Language aptitude 7. Attitudes and motivation 8. General intelligence (IQ) 9. Sense modality preference 10. Sociological preference (e.g., learning with peers vs. learning with the teacher) 11. Cognitive styles 12. Learner strategies	1. Individual learner difference (beliefs about language learning and learner factors) a. age b. aptitude c. attitude d. affective states e. learning style f. motivation g. personality 2. learner's personal background a. experience of L2/FL b. one's profession 3. situational and social factors a. the language being learned b. the setting of learning c. the tasks d. gender

Source: adopted from Chen, (2005, p.8) and Ellis (1994, p. 472).

LLSs play a "mediating role" between learner differences, such as belief, affective states, and learner factors and situational and social factors and outcomes of learning (Ellis, 1994). The following figure illustrates this relationship in what Ellis called the 'Strategy Framework':

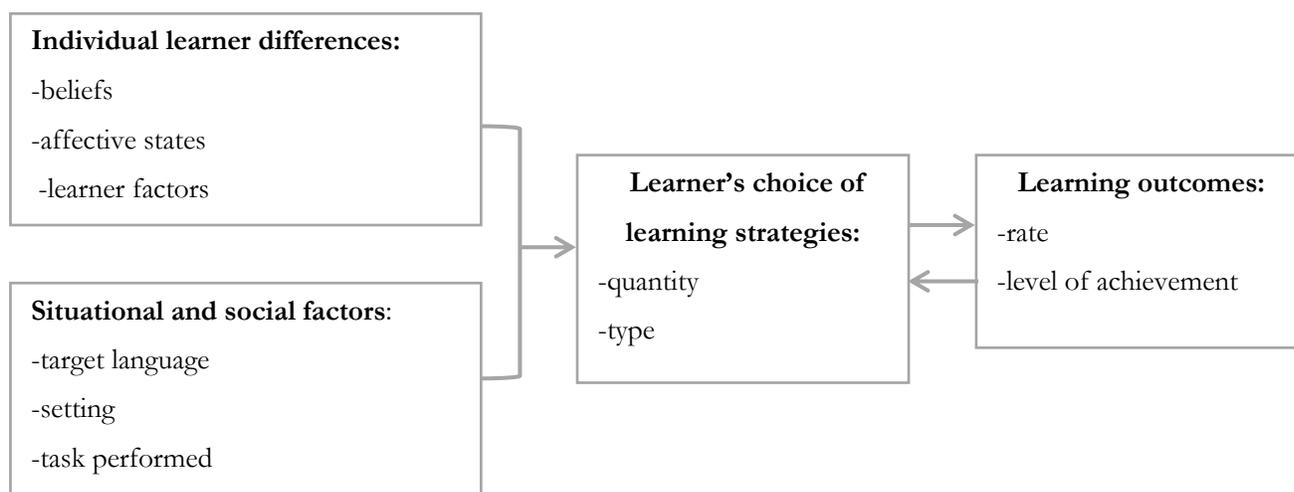


Figure 1. Ellis' (1994, p. 530) Strategy Framework.

However, since this study about the LLSs utilized by female EFL students and its relationship to university level, only studies of this sort will be addressed.

2.4 Language Learning Strategies among EFL/ESL Learners

In the field of foreign and second language research, several studies have shown that learning strategies play an important role in the success of language learning. In the last 20 years, a number of studies on LLSs were carried out to identify what LLSs learners use and the factors influencing their choice of these strategies (Nikoopour, Farsani & Neishabouri, 2011). In the following studies, Oxford's (1990b) Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire was used to assess the frequency and type of LLSs used and their relation to other factors.

In 1996, Bedell and Oxford investigated the LLSs used by Chinese students in China, Taiwan and USA, and found that compensation strategies were used more than any other LLSs; however, Puerto Rican and Egyptian students had low use of compensation strategies. Based on these results, Asian students typically use compensation strategies more than memory strategies. A study of Japanese EFL students yielded the same results (1999, Mochizuki). These studies show that context and nationality play an important role in LLSs choice.

In addition, the learners' choice of LLSs can be influenced by learning context (Chamot, 2005; Zhang, 2008). On the one hand, the results showed that in various EFL contexts such as Iran (Amini & Nikoopour, 2010), Korea (Oh, 1992) and Singapore (Wharton, 2000), learners always use learning strategies. In other words, they are strategy users. On the other hand, these studies have not reported exactly what kind of learning strategies have been used.

However, Nikoopour, Farsani and Neishabouri, (2011) investigated what strategies have been used most by EFL student and to what extent. Their study revealed that Iranian EFL learners are moderate LLS users in general. Also, Iranian EFL use and prefer the metacognitive strategy over other strategies, especially the memory strategy, which is the least used strategy.

Furthermore, LLSs have been linked to English language skills, such as reading, listening and writing. Li and Wang (2010) explored the relationship between reading strategies and reading self-efficacy in an EFL context with Chinese college students. They found that students with high self-efficacy seem to use more language reading strategies than those with low self-efficacy.

Language proficiency is another factor influencing LLSs among ESL/EFL learners (Zhao, 2007). High-proficiency learners use a wider variety of LLSs than low-proficiency

learners (Zhao, 2007). According to Wharton (2000), as L2 learners' proficiency improves, they use LLSs more effectively.

Based on LLSs research, a positive link has been established between and LLSs use and language proficiency (Abu Radwan, 2011; Khalil, 2005). Many studies investigated the relationship between the use of LLSs and learners' language proficiency. The results were the same, i.e., learners with high proficiency used multiple LLSs (Pannak & Chiramanee, 2011; Rahimi et al., 2008; Li, 2005; Griffiths, 2003).

2.4.1 LLSs among EFL Learners in the Arab World

Numerous studies have been conducted in the Arab countries, such as Qatar, Oman, Palestine, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. These studies sought to identify the relationship between gender or language proficiency or both and the LLSs used by university students.

Al-Buainain (2010) tried to identify the kind and frequency of LLSs employed by English major from level 1 to 4 in Qatar University. The findings indicate that university level and language proficiency influence LLSs use, but Al-Buainain stated that the differences were insignificant. The strategy most commonly used by the learners is the metacognitive strategy, whereas the affective strategy is the least commonly used.

A similar study was done at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in Oman by Abu Radwan (2011). This study investigated the effect of gender and language proficiency on LLSs use among EFL university students. The results revealed that males used social strategies more than females, which was the only difference. Also, the metacognitive strategy was the most commonly used strategy, whereas memory strategy was the least. Abu Radwan (2011) states

that the students used the metacognitive strategy most because the curriculum supports such a strategy.

Like the previous study, Khalil (2005) and Shmais (2003) investigated the same factors with EFL Palestinian students and found that metacognitive strategies are the strategies used most. They indicated that EFL students' use of LLSs was medium to high use. In these studies, students were aware of the important role played by LLSs and their relation to the development of language proficiency (Abu Radwan, 2011).

Another study in the Gulf states was conducted in Kuwait by El-Dib (2004), who studied the relationship between culture, gender and language proficiency in a hybrid context and LLSs choice. The results indicated that these are strong and significant factors influencing the learners' choice of LLSs; however, El-Dib (2004) found that in a cultural setting, learning context is the most powerful factor influencing LLSs use.

According to Abu Radwan (2011) and Al-Buainain (2010) in Saudi Arabia, only one study (Al-Otaibi, 2004) has investigated the LLSs employed by Saudi EFL students in Saudi Arabia. Other studies (McMullen, 2009; Al-Wahibee, 2000) investigated the use of LLSs in improving writing skills of Saudi EFL college students, the latter of which explored LLSs use by Saudis studying in the USA.

Al-Otaibi (2004) tried to identify LLSs used by male and female Saudi EFL students at four different levels – preparatory, elementary, intermediate, and advanced – within an intensive program of the English language. The study examined the type and frequency of LLSs and their relation to language proficiency, gender and motivation. Three instruments have been used – SILL Questionnaire, interview and MSN Messenger – to investigate other variables, such as

cultural or contextual variables, that could potentially influence the use of LLS (Al-Otaibi, 2004).

The descriptive analysis revealed that the students used learning strategies with a medium frequency. Language proficiency and gender were found out to be insignificant factors, whereas motivation was significant; however, female students used strategies more than male students. Furthermore, it was found that students' motivation is affected by teaching practices.

Like the previous study, Al-Wahibee (2000) found that ESL Saudi female students are more active and hard working in class than males; thus, they use LLSs more than males (Al-Wahibee, 2000). Also, no significant differences were found between males and females in terms of language proficiency levels. McMullen's study (2009) yielded similar findings that female students are more active users of strategy and that no significant differences exist between the genders; also, LLSs may be able to improve writing skills. Many researchers believe that LLSs can be used to improve EFL/ESL skills in different contexts.

2.4.1.1 Language Learning Strategies in Saudi Arabia

Strategies depend largely on the learning behavior of the learner that she/he acquires from her/his socio-cultural community (Brown, 1981). The system of Saudi education, culture and society places great emphasis on memorization (Al-Swelem, 1997). Unfortunately, from the early stages of school, children are trained to memorize most subjects and are rewarded for it.

Other strategies seemed to be used along with the memorization strategy, such as rehearsing (Al-Otaibi, 2004). Learning in Saudi Arabia depends heavily on memorization strategy, and the learning of English is no different. El-Daly (1991) described learning English as follows:

English was considered an academic course like 'history', 'geography', and 'social studies'. Our main task [as students] was to memorize a lot of grammatical rules, a lot of vocabulary and structures with a view to passing the course and moving ahead to the next level. (p. 3)

On the other hand, Abou-Rokbah (2002) praises the value of memorization since it will eventually enable students to have a better chance at getting into college and graduating with higher marks. He stated that it became a general rule that the more the students memorize, the greater their chances of success.

In short, among students in Saudi Arabia, there is a common pattern in the use of strategy. Memorization is used most because it is rewarded both educationally and culturally (Al-Otaibi, 2004). According to Al-Otaibi (2004), the studies of English LLSs employed by higher education students and LLSs factors have not yet been fully investigated (Al-Otaibi, 2004; Alwahibee, 2000). Thus, this study aims to explore the LLSs used by college female EFL student and their relation to the university level.

Chapter III

Research Methodology

The current chapter describes the following: (1) Research design, (2) Data collection, (3) Content Validity and Reliability, (4) Data analysis, and (5) Ethical Considerations.

3.1. Research Design

The current study is a descriptive quantitative study that seeks to identify the LLSs used by female Saudi EFL students at three universities in Riyadh: Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Princess Norah bint Abdulrahman University, and King Saud University. A descriptive study such as this one aims to describe phenomena as they exist in real-life situations. In descriptive studies, behaviors that occur can be captured in the results (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009). One descriptive study design is the survey method, which is used in this research to gather an accurate account of characteristics of a specific group of individuals (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009).

A closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect a large amount of information and accurate answers (Dornyei, 2007). In addition, participants participated in the study voluntarily. They were not limited to a specific time and perceived no influence.

3.2. Data Collection

3.2.1. Population and Sample

Female Saudi EFL students at Saudi universities were chosen as the population of the current study. In total, the participants included 145 Saudi EFL female students at three universities in Riyadh: Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Princess Norah bint Abdulrahman University, and King Saud University. Participants were classified into three proficiency levels based on their college levels. Thus, students enrolled at levels one, two and three were considered beginners. Students enrolled at levels four and five were considered intermediate. And students enrolled at levels six, seven and eight were considered advanced.

Table 2

Demographic description of participants by university

University	No.
Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University	30
Princess Norah bint Abdulrahman University	72
King Saud University	43
Total	145

Table 3

Demographic description of participants by level

College Level	Total
Beginners	34
Intermediate	45
Advanced	66

The sampling method used in this survey was simple random sampling, which is a method of selecting a sample from a population where the individuals are considered to have an equal chance of being selected (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007).

3.2.2. Data Collection Instrument

In this study, version 7.0 (ESL/EFL) of the Strategy Inventory Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire by Oxford (1990b) was used as research instrument to collect data. Version 7.0 of SILL was chosen for the present study because it was designed to elicit information about LLSs

employed by ESL/EFL students. In this study, an adapted version of SILL was used to elicit information about the strategy employed by 145 Saudi Female EFL students at university.

The SILL questionnaire consists of 30 items that are scored according to a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never or almost never true of me) to 5 (Always). Below are the scores of the SILL questionnaire:

Table 4

The scores of the SILL questionnaire

Statement	Score
Always	5
Usually true of me	4
Somewhat true of me	3
Usually not true of me	2
Never	1

Furthermore, the SILL questionnaire is divided into two major categories – direct and indirect strategies – each of which consists of three subcategories. The following Table (4) shows the framework of SILL questionnaire:

Table 5

Description of SILL categories:

	Content	Section	Item Number
Direct Strategies	Memory strategies	Part (A)	(1-6)
	Cognitive strategies	Part (B)	(7-13)

	Compensation strategies	Part (C)	(14-17)
Indirect Strategies	Metacognitive strategies	Part (D)	(18-23)
	Affective strategies	Part (E)	(24-26)
	Social strategies	Part (F)	(27-30)
Total			30 items

Since the development of SILL questionnaire, it has been carried out 40 to 50 times (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Oxford & Green, 1995) and about 9,000 language learners have used it as an instrument in studies. It was translated into several languages, including French, German, Russian, Ukrainian, Spanish, Korean, Chinese and Japanese (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Oxford & Green, 1995).

3.2.2.1. Content Validity and Reliability:

Within the last 10 to 15 years, SILL has been the only instrument to have been examined many times for its validity and reliability (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Oxford & Green, 1995); however, since our questionnaire was an adapted version of SILL, it was presented for validation to some professors in applied linguistics and teaching mythology, including Oxford. No further changes or modifications were deemed necessary. In addition, the SILL questionnaire lacks Social Desirability Response Bias (SDRB) (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) defined SDRB as:

The tendency of a person to answer dishonestly for one or two purposes: to please the researcher or to show himself or herself as being a good or socially acceptable person (p. 11).

Aside from the validity test, a pilot study was conducted to check the feasibility and clarity of the questionnaire; the questionnaire was distributed to 10 Saudi EFL female students at the three universities in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It took the students 7 minutes to finish the online questionnaire. To test the reliability of the data collected, Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.86. A Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.86$ is considered a good internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2003).

3.2.3.. Data analysis

A Web-based questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale was used to collect the quantitative data. The questionnaire was composed using Lime Survey (v1.91) software. The data was analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 20 software. The analysis, findings and presentation will be discussed and presented in Chapter 4.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

In an educational study that involves human participants, some considerations should be made in order to avoid unexpected results. In this study, the names of the participants were not stated. They were only referred to as beginner, intermediate or advanced. Furthermore, in order to guarantee the honesty of the participants' responses, the questionnaire directions emphasized that there is no right or wrong answer.

Chapter IV

Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents descriptive statistical analyses of the collected data. The data was collected by a 30-item questionnaire (Appendix A). Also, it presents responses to the research questions. The chapter ends with a discussion of findings of previous studies that are related to the present study.

4.2 Participants' Statistics

The following Table 6 and Figure 2 show the distribution of the participants of the study according to university. The sample included 145 Saudi EFL female students at three Saudi universities in Riyadh: Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Princess Norah bint Abdulrahman University and King Saud University. Seventy-two participants were from the English Department of the College of Languages and Translation at Princess Norah bint Abdul Rahman University, comprising 49% of the total participants. Thirty participants were from the English Department of the College of Languages and Translation at Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, representing 21% of the total participants. Forty-three participants were from the English Department of the College of Languages and Translation at King Saud University, representing 30% of the total participants.

Table 6

Distribution of Study Sample According to University

University	Frequency	Percentage
PNU	72	49%
ImamU	30	21%
KSU	43	30%
Total	145	100.0%

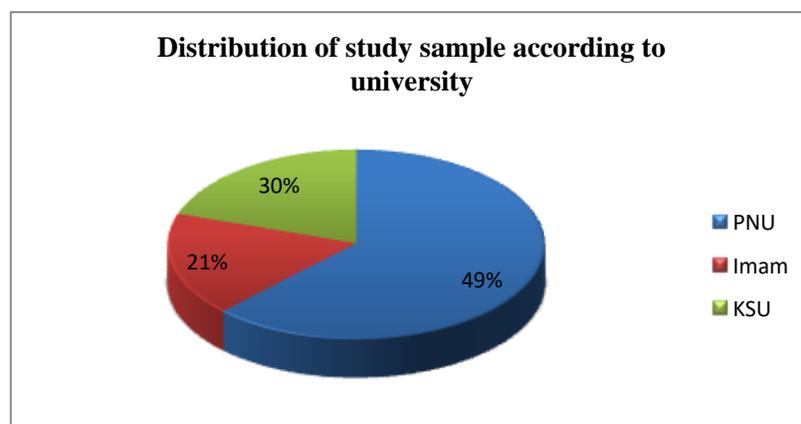
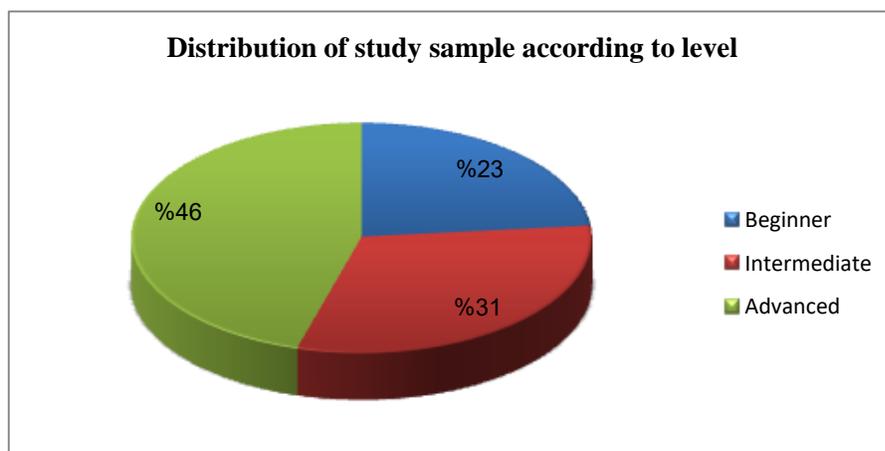
*Figure 2.* Distribution of study sample according to university.

Table 7 and Figure 3 show that the participants were grouped according to their university level, as beginner, intermediate, or advanced; there were 34 in the beginner category, 45 in the intermediate, and 66 in the advanced. Participants who belonged to levels one, two, or three were classified as beginner. Those belonging to levels four and five were classified as intermediate; and those belonging to levels six, seven, or eight were classified as advanced.

Table 7

Distribution of Study Sample According to Level

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Beginner	34	23%
Intermediate	45	31%
Advanced	66	46%
Total	145	100.0%

*Figure 3.* Distribution of study sample according to level.**4.3 Results****4.3.1 Question # 1: What strategies are used by learners at three proficiency levels?**

The researcher attempts to answer the above question according to students college levels in which the participants were classified into three proficiency levels based on their college levels. Thus, students enrolled at levels one, two and three were considered beginners. Students

enrolled at levels four and five were considered intermediate. And students enrolled at levels six, seven and eight were considered advanced.

4.3.1.1 Beginners

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for beginners

Strategy	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Metacognitive strategy	34	2.17	5.00	3.9853	.78856
Cognitive strategy	34	1.71	4.86	3.6723	.76369
Social strategy	34	1.25	5.00	3.5588	.94360
Compensation strategy	34	2.00	5.00	3.4559	.87141
Memory strategy	34	1.33	4.83	3.3824	.80876
Affective strategy	34	1.00	5.00	3.2451	.90009

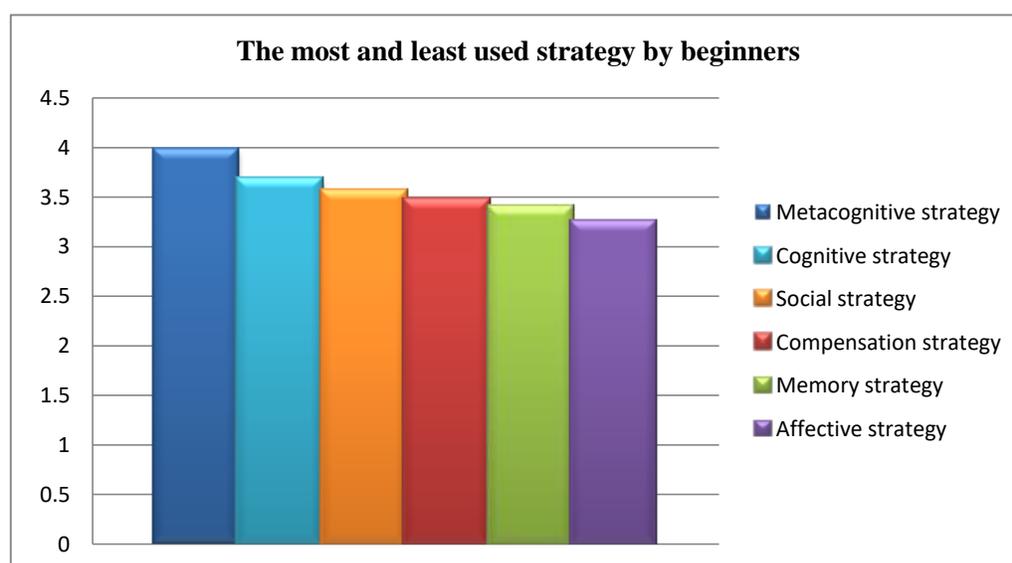


Figure 4. The most and least used strategy by beginners.

Table 8 and Figure 4 illustrate that metacognitive strategy scored the highest mean (3.9853). This shows that metacognitive strategy is the strategy used most by beginners. As Table 7 shows, affective strategy scored the lowest mean (3.2451). This shows that affective strategy is the strategy used least by beginners.

4.3.1.2 Intermediate

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Intermediate Students

Strategy	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Metacognitive strategy	45	1.67	4.83	3.9111	.70047
Compensation strategy	45	1.00	5.00	3.6111	.70015
Cognitive strategy	45	1.71	4.71	3.4635	.61908
Social strategy	45	1.00	5.00	3.4111	.83794
Affective strategy	45	1.00	4.67	3.0667	.78044
Memory strategy	45	1.33	4.50	3.0593	.74802

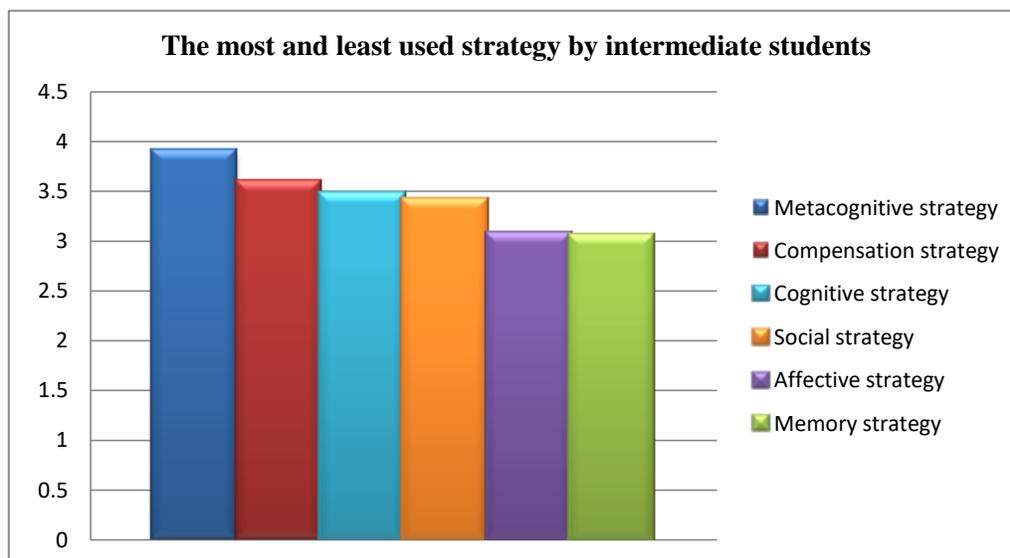


Figure 5. The strategies used most and least by intermediate students.

Table 9 and Figure 5 illustrate that the metacognitive strategy scored the highest mean (3.9111). This shows that the metacognitive strategy is the strategy used most by intermediate students. As Table 9 shows, the memory strategy scored the lowest mean (3.0593). This shows that the memory strategy is the strategy used least by intermediate students.

4.3.1.3 Advanced

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics for Advanced Students

Strategy	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Metacognitive strategy	66	2.00	5.00	3.7904	.72283
Compensation strategy	66	2.00	5.00	3.7386	.67287
Cognitive strategy	66	1.29	4.71	3.6277	.68300
Memory strategy	66	1.83	4.33	3.3232	.59116
Social strategy	66	1.00	5.00	3.3144	.89261
Affective strategy	66	1.67	5.00	3.0909	.77690

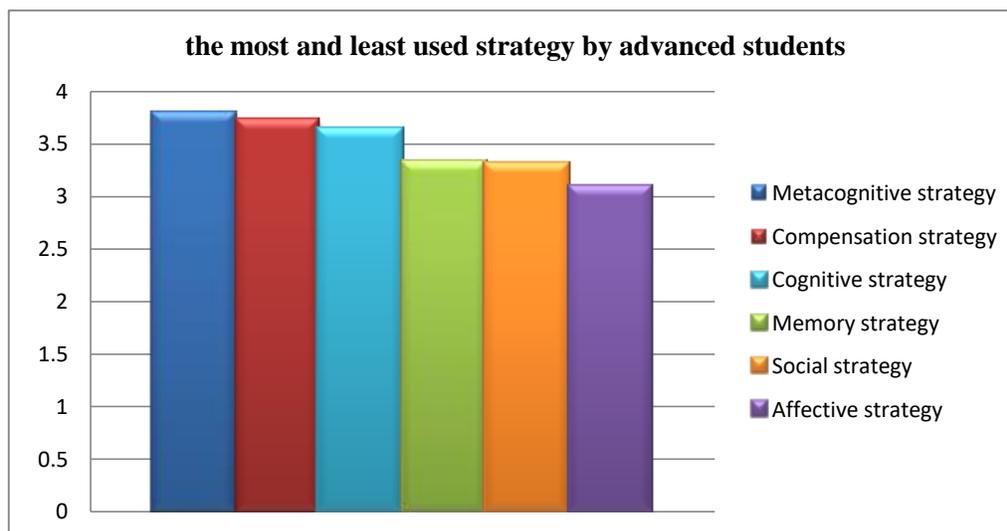


Figure 6. Strategies used most and least by advanced students.

Table 10 and Figure 6 illustrate that the metacognitive strategy scored the highest mean (3.7904). This shows that the metacognitive strategy is the strategy used most by advanced students. As Table 10 shows, the affective strategy scored the lowest mean (3.0909). This shows that the affective strategy is the strategy used least by advanced students.

4.3.2 Question # 2: To what extent does the university attended by the participants affect the strategy use?

Analysis of variance ANOVA was used to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences within universities in the strategies used. As shown in Table 11, there is no statistically significant difference at the level of 0.05 within the different universities. Therefore, university doesn't affect language learning strategies use.

Table 11

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for differences between universities in strategies used

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Memory strategy	Between Groups	.108	2	.054	.108	.898
	Within Groups	71.395	142	.503		
	Total	71.503	144			
Cognitive strategy	Between Groups	.611	2	.306	.649	.524
	Within Groups	66.863	142	.471		
	Total	67.474	144			
Compensation strategy	Between Groups	.659	2	.330	.606	.547
	Within Groups	77.223	142	.544		
	Total	77.882	144			
Metacognitive strategy	Between Groups	.256	2	.128	.237	.790
	Within Groups	76.760	142	.541		
	Total	77.015	144			
Affective strategy	Between Groups	.782	2	.391	.599	.551
	Within Groups	92.702	142	.653		

	Total	93.484	144			
Social strategy	Between Groups	.145	2	.072	.091	.913
	Within Groups	113.267	142	.798		
	Total	113.412	144			

4.3.3 Question # 3: What are the differences if any that learners exhibit at each proficiency level?

Analysis of variance ANOVA was used to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences in the strategies used within each level. As shown in Table 12, there is no statistically significant difference at the level of 0.05 within the different college levels.

Therefore, there is no relation between college levels and language learning strategies.

Table 12

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the differences in the strategies used between levels

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Memory strategy	Between Groups	2.583	2	1.291	2.661	.073
	Within Groups	68.920	142	.485		
	Total	71.503	144			
Cognitive strategy	Between Groups	1.043	2	.521	1.115	.331
	Within Groups	66.431	142	.468		
	Total	67.474	144			
Compensation strategy	Between Groups	1.825	2	.912	1.703	.186
	Within Groups	76.057	142	.536		
	Total	77.882	144			
Metacognitive strategy	Between Groups	.944	2	.472	.881	.416
	Within Groups	76.071	142	.536		
	Total	77.015	144			
Affective strategy	Between Groups	.716	2	.358	.548	.579
	Within Groups	92.768	142	.653		
	Total	93.484	144			

Social strategy	Between Groups	1.346	2	.673	.853	.428
	Within Groups	112.066	142	.789		
	Total	113.412	144			

4.4 Discussion

This section discusses the findings of some other studies that are consistent or inconsistent with the present study. First, the consistent findings are discussed followed by the inconsistent study findings where differences are discussed.

As the above tables show, metacognitive strategies had the highest mean among all levels showing a high use of metacognitive strategies followed by compensation strategies in intermediate and advance levels, while affective and memory strategies had the lowest mean. According to Oxford (1990b), a reporting scale is used in order to help teachers and students figure out which strategies are used most: (1) “high usage” (3.5–5.0), (2) “medium usage” (2.5–3.4), and (3) “low usage” (1.0–2.4) (Oxford, 1990b: 293-300). In this study, it was found that the means of all six strategies were medium to high use. According to Oxford (1990b), they are between 3.0 and 3.4 as shown in Tables 8, 9, and 10.

Metacognitive strategies are those that involve the learning of language through planning, organizing, monitoring and evaluating where students are capable of controlling their emotions and motivations regarding language learning (Oxford, 1990b). Thus, students seem to need to manage their own learning, which is the definition of metacognition (Borkowski et al., 1987). O’Malley and Chamot (1990) believe that metacognitive and cognitive strategies are often used together in order to support one another. According to Flavell (1979), the combined use of strategies has a greater effect than using one strategy.

According to Al-Buainain (2010), students prefer to use metacognitive and cognitive strategies in an intensive learning environment. Students majoring in English have a strong motivation for learning English due to the prospects of academic and professional advancement. Also, they are afraid of failing the course, which is a strong motivation for them to take control of their own learning. Thus, they show metacognitive behaviors such as self-monitoring and planning learning progress in order to achieve their goal of passing the course. Pintrich and Garcia (2008) believe that metacognitive knowledge and high academic performance cannot be separated from each other. Successful language learning depends on the high use of metacognitive strategies since they enable learners to coordinate their own learning process (Oxford 1990a). Therefore, since the metacognitive strategy guides learners towards successful learning, it is an important input in an EFL learning environment like Saudi Arabia.

The findings of the following studies are consistent with those of the current study, which showed high use of metacognitive strategies and low use of memory strategies, as shown in Tables 8 and 9. Studies by Nisbet (2002) and Han and Lin (2000) in China investigated LLSs used by EFL students. Both studies employed Oxford's SILL survey on Chinese EFL university students. In Nisbet's (2002) study, the students were third-year university English majors, and in Han and Lin (2000) study, the students were second-year English majors. Both studies showed a high use of metacognitive strategies and low use of memory strategies, which is consistent with the current study. Also, these studies reported that students were medium to high strategy users, which is consistent with this study. The results of the strategies used by students in the present study are similar to findings reported by students in Asian countries such as Taiwan, Japan and China (e.g., Liu, 2004; Chang, 2011). Moreover, these findings are in line with studies whose subjects were Arabs, such as Aziz Khalil (2005), Riazi (2007) and Al-Buainain (2010).

Furthermore, the present findings indicate that social strategies are used by beginners and intermediates more than affective and memory strategies, and that they are used by advanced more than affective strategies, which are consistent with the findings of Phillip's (1991) study conducted on ESL students in Asia. Hence, students prefer to use social strategies which involve communication and interaction with others like asking for clarification or help more than memorization.

On the other hand, the current findings of the low use of memory strategies contradict the stereotypical descriptions of Asian students, especially Saudi students who prefer and depend on memory strategies and rote learning and language (e.g., Al-Otaibi, 2004; Wharton, 2000; Yang, 1999). Also, this study's findings are inconsistent with those of the studies such as Abu Shmais (2003) and Griffiths and Parr (1999). Abu Shmais (2003) explored the use of LLSs among Palestinian students at different university levels (e.g., sophomore, junior, senior), and found that metacognitive strategies are the most common, which is consistent with the present study. However, the least used strategies are compensation strategies, which is inconsistent with the current findings.

In addition, Griffiths and Parr (1999) investigated LLS use by ESL learners in Auckland where they found that the most used strategies are social strategies, which is inconsistent with the results of this study.

In addition, the low use of affective strategies reflects students' fear of making mistakes, which keeps them from trying since they are anxious when speaking English. Nevertheless, other factors such as individual characteristics, culture and educational system in Saudi Arabia, could be reasons behind the use of some LLSs. Also, students are more concerned with getting good marks, passing exams and answering question related to their curriculum.

In conclusion, Saudi EFL female students at three Saudi universities in Riyadh – Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Princess Norah bint Abdulrahman University and King Saud University – at all levels preferred to use metacognitive strategies despite the expectation that Saudi students would prefer and depend upon memory strategies. On the contrary, memory strategies scored as one of the least favorite strategies. Furthermore, studies like Nisbet (2002), Lin (2000); Aziz Khalil (2005), Riazi (2007), and Al-Buainain (2010) reported findings consistent with the current study, whereas studies such as Abu Shmais (2003) and Griffiths and Parr (1999) are inconsistent with the findings of this study.

Chapter V

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The present study explored language learning strategies use by female Saudi English majors at some Saudi universities. The results indicated that students were medium to high users of strategies. The findings showed that students prefer metacognitive strategies most which help students to coordinate the process of their learning, such as arranging, planning, organizing and evaluating learning, and setting goals and paying attention (Oxford, 1990b).

Furthermore, there were no significant differences within universities and university levels on overall strategy use. As the findings showed, metacognitive strategies were preferred over other strategies, and memory strategies and affective strategies were the least preferred strategies.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications:

- The current findings highlight the significance of integrating LLSs into curriculum design and L2 classrooms (Khalil, 2005; Oxford, 1990b; Abu-Radwan, 2011). Teachers and students should be aware of the different LLSs. This can be done through proper training and instruction about LLSs. Students can become independent, self-confident and successful language learners through the use of strategies (Al-Otaibi, 2004; Abu-Radwan, 2011).

- It is essential to integrate explicit and implicit strategy use instructions and training into regular lessons (Cohen et al., 1996) since they provide students at different levels of learning and proficiency as well as various learning styles the opportunity to practice many strategies which are “appropriate to different instructional tasks and activities that constitute an essential part of the classroom L2 experience” (Khalil, 2005, p. 115).
- Teachers should evaluate textbooks and other materials in order to find out whether they include LLSs and LLS training.
- Language teacher should reconsider teaching methods and classroom style to assess whether her/his lesson plans give students the opportunity to practice various LLSs and styles (Lessard-Clouston, 1997).
- As the findings show, students highly prefer metacognitive strategies that help learners to coordinate the process of their learning, such as arranging, planning, and organizing. According to Anderson (2002), developing an awareness of metacognitive strategies may lead to the strong development of "cognitive skills".
- In the literature, the significance of LLSs in language teaching and learning is clearly documented (Oxford, 1995; Ranjbari, 2003). Learners try to use different LLSs in order to overcome various challenges and to process new input since there is a great amount of information processed by language learners in language classrooms. Therefore, the teachers’ role is crucial in strategy training. Through teaching LLSs, teachers can help students manage their own learning so that students can be language learners who are motivated, efficient and independent (Chamot, 2005). In order for the teacher to provide students with many different learning strategies that can meet the needs and expectations of students who have various learning styles, strategies and motivations, teachers should have enough

knowledge about their students' LLSs, motivations, goals and comprehension of the course being taught (Lessard-Clouston, 1997).

5.3 Recommendations for further Research:

- Further research is recommended to conduct studies on LLSs since LLSs have not investigated enough about Arab EFL learners in general and about Saudi EFL learners in particular.
- Researchers should examine other factors that influence the use of LLSs, such as age, gender, nationality, belief, learning style, linguistic proficiency, motivation, culture, curriculum design and educational system.
- Longitudinal studies should be conducted where changes in the use of LLSs are traced and examined over a period of time.
- In addition, other research instruments can be used in multiple ways and/or in various contexts in order to collect data about the use of LLSs in a given study, such as interviews, diaries and observations.

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Appendix A

	Never	Usually not true of me.	Somewhat true of me	Usually true of me.	Always
1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.					
2. I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.					
3. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.					
4. I physically act out new English words.					
5. I review English lessons often.					
6. I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.					
7. I try to talk like native English speakers.					
8. I start conversations in English.					
9. I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.					
10. I read for pleasure in English.					

11. I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.					
12. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.					
13. I try not to translate word-for-word.					
14. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.					
15. I read English without looking up every new word.					
16. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.					
17. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.					
18. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.					
19. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.					
20. I look for people I can talk to in English.					
21. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.					
22. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.					
23. I think about my progress in learning English.					

24. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.					
25. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.					
26. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.					
27. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.					
28. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.					
29. I practice English with other students.					
30. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.					