

Effects of Attitude and Motivation on the Use of Language Learning Strategies by Iranian EFL University Students

Dr.F. Sadighi*

Shiraz University

M. Zarafshan, M.A.**

Bandar-Lengeh Islamic Azad University

ABSTRACT

This study explored the effects of attitude, motivation, and years of study on the use of language learning strategies by Iranian EFL university students. The participants of the study consisted of 126 freshmen and seniors majoring in English Translation and Teaching English at Shiraz Islamic Azad University. Two instruments were used to gather the needed data: A 50-item Likert-type strategy questionnaire and a Likert-type background questionnaire to elicit data on attitude, motivation, and years of study. Analysis of the results revealed that the subjects of the study reported to employing metacognitive, social, affective, and compensation strategies more frequently than memory and cognitive strategies. Also in this study, attitude proved to influence the use of Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) significantly. That is, learners with positive attitude used LLSs more frequently than those with negative attitude. Regarding the factor of motivation, integratively-motivated students employed more strategies than instrumentally-oriented ones. Furthermore, seniors showed greater use of LLSs than freshmen.

Keywords: 1. Language learning strategies 2. Learner's strategies 3. Attitude 4. Motivation.

1. Introduction

1.1. Preliminaries

Since the late 60s and early 70s, there has been a significant shift within the field of language learning and teaching with greater emphasis on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching. It seems a reasonable goal for language teachers to make their students become less dependent on the teachers and reach a level of autonomy (O'Malley and Chamot, 1995). Learners need to keep on learning even if the formal classroom setting is not available. Learner autonomy is in line with current views about the active involvement of learners, popularity of learner-centered approaches, and learners' independence of teachers (Littlewood, 1996). A key component of an autonomous approach to language learning and teaching is the learner's active cognitive processes referred to as learning strategies (LSs) (Littlewood, 1999).

In parallel to this new shift of interest, how learning strategies influence the success of language learners has been the primary concern of the researchers. Rubin (1975) states that the main underlying assumption behind learning strategies research in second / foreign language education has been that one of the factors that makes "good" learners good is their use of learning strategies. Having enough knowledge about successful learners' use of learning strategies, teachers can provide less successful learners with

* Professor of English Language and Linguistics

** Instructor, Azad University

those strategies and consequently enhance their learning.

In this regard, many researchers dealing with the area of second / foreign language learning have explored language learning strategies (LLSs) that language learners use either consciously or unconsciously (Rubin, 1975; Bialystok, 1981; Huang and Naerssen, 1987; Oxford and Nyikos, 1989; Ehrman and Oxford, 1989, 1990; Nyikos and Oxford, 1993; Oxford and Ehrman, 1995; Sugeng, 1997).

Language learning strategies as a determinant factor in the facilitation of learning a new language have been defined in different ways. Rubin (1975: 43) describes them as "... the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge." Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992:209) define LLSs as "intentional behavior and thoughts that learners make use of during learning in order to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information." In a well-known study, 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." Here in this study, the definition of LSs is adopted from Oxford (1990) as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (p.8).

Another major area of second / foreign language learning research is the role played by affective variables in the process of learning. Among the affective factors influencing the success of students in learning a language, attitude is an influential one. Sarnoff (1970:279) defines attitude as "a disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to a class of objects." Holmes (1992: 346) states that "people develop attitudes towards languages which reflect their views about those who speak the languages, and the contexts and functions with which they are associated."

Likewise, motivation as the other main determinant of second / foreign language learning achievement has attracted the attention of many investigators. Different definitions of motivation have been posited by researchers. Gardner (1985: 10) defines motivation as "... the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language." In addition, Brown (1994: 152) states that "motivation is commonly thought of as an inner drive, impulse, emotion, or desire that moves one to a particular action."

The early work of Gardner and Lambert (1972) introduced two major clusters of motivation indices: instrumental and integrative. In the context of language learning, instrumental motivation refers to the learner's desire to learn a language for "utilitarian" purposes (such as employment or travel), whereas integrative motivation refers to the desire to learn a language to integrate successfully into the target language community.

Following the issues discussed above, the main objective of the present study has been specified to investigate the use of LLSs by Iranian EFL university students and its relation to the factors of attitude (positive and negative) and motivation (instrumental and integrative). More precisely, it attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What LLSs do Iranian EFL university students use more frequently?
2. Are there any differences between students with positive attitude and those with negative attitude regarding their strategy use?
3. What are the differences between integratively-motivated and instrumentally-motivated learners concerning their strategy choice?
4. What is the difference in the types of strategies used by freshmen and seniors?

2. Background Literature

2.1. Theoretical Concepts Related to LLSs

Research on LLSs is fairly new. Some studies have focused on the differences in

strategies between effective learners and less successful language learners. Many investigators, interested in LLSs, have attempted to classify the strategies used by successful language learners in order to use these to train less effective learners (Bialystok, 1981; Oxford, 1990; O'Malley and Chamot, 1995). Oxford's classification of language learning strategies (cited in Ehrman and Oxford, 1990) is the most comprehensive system of six strategies, classified as direct or indirect. The direct strategies include memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies which are directly involved in learning the target language. The indirect strategies, indirectly involved in language learning, include metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Table 1 illustrates these six strategies as follows:

1. Oxford and Crookall (1989).
2. Ehrman and Oxford (1990).

Table 1: Strategy types.

Memory strategies
1. For entering information into memory and retrieving it 2. Techniques specifically tailored to help the learner store new information into the memory and retrieve it later.
Cognitive strategies
1. For manipulating the language for reception and production of meaning. 2. Skills that involve manipulation or transformation of the language in some direct way. 3. Associating new information with existing information in long term memory and for revising internal mental models.
Compensation strategies
1. For overcoming limitations in existing knowledge. 2. Behaviors used to compensate for missing knowledge of some kind. 3. For overcoming deficiencies in knowledge of the language.
Metacognitive strategies
1. For organizing and evaluating learning. 2. Behavior used for centering, arranging, planning, and evaluating one's learning. They used to provide executive control over the learning process. 3. For exercising executive control through planning, arranging, focusing, and evaluating the learning process.
Affective Strategies
1. For managing emotions and attitudes. 2. Techniques with which learners gain better control over their emotions, attitudes, and motivations related to language learning. 3. For directing feelings, motivations, and attitudes related to learning.
Social strategies
1. For learning with others. 2. Actions involve other people in the language learning process. 3. For interacting with others and managing discourse.

In recent years, the complexity of strategy use has become more apparent. It has become clear that there are different strategy characteristics not only of different learners, but also of the same learner at different levels, with different language learning goals, engaged in the use of different skills, and so on (Nyikos and Oxford, 1993). As a result, research began on the factors affecting the choice of strategies, rather than just the strategies themselves. In a review by Oxford (1989, cited in Oxford and Nyikos, 1989: 291), strategy choice was found to be related to the following factors:

1. language being learned,
2. level of language learning, proficiency, or course,
3. degree of metacognitive awareness,

4. sex,
5. affective variables such as attitude, motivation, and language learning goals,
6. specific personality traits,
7. career orientation or field of specialization,
8. overall personality type,
9. learning style,
10. national origin,
11. aptitude,
12. language teaching methods,
13. task requirement, and
14. type of strategy training.

Oxford and Nyikos (1989) studied the relationship between language learning strategies and factors such as sex, motivation, major, and years of study. Ehrman and Oxford (1989) investigated the effects of sex differences, career, and psychological type on adults language learning strategies. The results of another study by Ehrman and Oxford (1990) indicated that there is a link between language learning strategies on the one hand, and learning styles, sex, occupation, and age on the other. Oxford and Ehrman (1995) examined the effects of proficiency, learning styles, motivation, age, gender, and anxiety on the choice of language learning strategies by adults. In an experiment done by Sugeng (1997), it was reported that boys used a greater amount of metacognitive strategies than girls.

2.2. Effects of Attitude on the Use of LLSs

Few studies have been performed to examine the effects of attitude on language learning strategies. In this connection, three studies are reported here.

Yang (1993) studied the relationship between learners' language attitude and LLSs. The participants were 505 undergraduate students of English as a Second Language (ESL) in Taiwan. The related data were gathered through administration of three questionnaires: A language beliefs inventory, a language learning strategy inventory, and an individual background survey. The result showed that the students had positive attitude toward English. Also, it was reported that the subjects used a variety of LLSs: formal oral-practice strategies, compensation, social, metacognitive, functional practice strategies, and cognitive-memory strategies. It was concluded that there existed some connection between learner's belief and the use of learning strategies.

In an experiment, Hassanpur (1999) administered a background questionnaire and an inventory for learning strategy to 102 Science students studying English as a special course at Shiraz University. Although the strategy mean of students with positive attitude was higher than that of those with negative attitude, the difference was not found significant ($P < .05$).

Sedaghat (2001) investigated the effects of attitude, motivation, and level of proficiency on the use of listening comprehension strategies by Iranian female EFL students. The subjects were 109 university students from both Shiraz Islamic Azad University and Shiraz University majoring in Teaching English and English Literature. The findings of the study revealed that students with positive attitude used metacognitive, memory, cognitive, compensation, and social strategies more than those having negative attitude. Regarding the affective strategies, none of the two groups showed any significant difference.

2.3. Effects of Motivation on the Choice of LLSs

Among the factors that affect strategy use and language learning outcome, motivation is considered a significant variable. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) report

that their undergraduate foreign language participants, who were substantially motivated, tended to adopt more learning strategies and use them more frequently when compared to those relatively less motivated. The highly motivated learners also demonstrated better results in language learning.

The findings reported by Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) seem congruent with what Oxford and Nyikos (1989: 294) conclude: "The degree of expressed motivation to learn the language was the most powerful influence on strategy choice." Oxford and Shearin (1994) declare that it is of utmost importance to understand students' motivation which directly affects the utilization of LLSs.

In an investigation by Tamada (1996), 24 Japanese third-year college students learning English as a second language in England were studied in terms of their use of learning strategies and effects of the factors of motivation, proficiency, and personality on these strategies. The results indicated that differences in motivation orientation (instrumental or integrative) significantly influenced the use of language learning strategies.

In her study of 102 Shiraz University Science students, Hassanpur (1999) found that integratively-motivated students employ more memory and cognitive strategies than instrumentally-motivated ones. Regarding the four remaining strategies, integratively motivated learners reported to use these strategies more frequently than those with instrumental motivation, but the difference was not significant at 0.05 level.

Chang and Huang (1999) examined the use of LLSs by 46 Taiwanese undergraduate and graduate students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the United States. In this survey, motivation proved to correlate significantly with the choice of LLSs. The findings showed that instrumentally-motivated learners employed more memory and affective strategies, while students with integrative motivation used higher range of cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies. Compensation strategies were used almost equally by the two groups.

Finally, Sedaghat (2001) studied the effects of attitude, motivation, and proficiency level on the use of listening comprehension strategies by 109 Iranian female EFL learners. Regarding the factor of motivation, the only area of difference found to be significant was the social domain. Integratively-oriented language learners used more social strategies than instrumentally-oriented learners. In other strategies, the difference was not found significant ($P < .05$). A justification for the findings of this study is that integratively-motivated students tend to integrate and assimilate themselves in the target language culture. So they are after finding some ways to communicate with the speakers of the target language; therefore, they build up social strategies more than other strategies.

2.4. Effects of Years of Study on the Use of LLSs

In a single study related to the effect of years of study on the use of LLSs, Sugeng (1997) conducted a study on a total of 240 elementary school students in Indonesia. The participants were chosen from fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The instrument for data collection included 30 items developed from the strategy taxonomy devised by this particular study. Grade level was found significant for cognitive and affective strategies. Fifth-grade students used more cognitive strategies than either fourth or sixth-grade students, while affective strategies were employed more by fourth-grade learners in comparison with fifth and sixth-grade students.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 126 undergraduate university students,

both male and female, majoring in English Translation and Teaching English at Shiraz Islamic Azad University. They were all freshmen and seniors. Their distribution according to the majors and years of the study is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Subjects' grouping according to their majors and years of study.

Majors Years of Study	Translation	Teaching	Total
Freshman	33	36	69
Senior	31	26	57
Total	64	62	126

3.2. Instruments

Two instruments were used to gather the needed data for this study. The students' strategy use was measured by Oxford's (1994) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (adapted from Hassanpur, 1999). It is a 50-item Likert-type questionnaire with five-scale responses regarding the six major strategy groups as distributed in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of strategy items according to the six strategy types.

Strategy Type	Items	Total
Memory	1-9	9
Cognitive	10-23	14
Compensation	24-29	6
Metacognitive	30-38	9
Affective	39-44	6
Social	45-50	6
		50

The items were in the form of statements and the participants graded them from 1 to 5 where:

- 1 means **never true of me.**
- 2 means **rarely true of me.**
- 3 means **sometimes true of me.**
- 4 means **usually true of me.**
- 5 means **always true of me.**

In order to elicit data on the subjects' personal characteristics such as level of education; motivation; and attitude, a background questionnaire, adapted from Hassanpur (1999) was used. The items were divided into two sections: (1) items focusing on the students' attitude toward learning and studying language (34 items) and (2) items concerning the students' motivation for studying English (25 items). The subjects scored each statement on the scale from 1 to 5 where:

- 1 means **absolutely disagree.**
- 2 means **disagree.**
- 3 means **not decided.**
- 4 means **agree.**
- 5 means **absolutely agree.**

To facilitate the task of the subjects and avoid any misunderstanding of the items, the Persian translation of the two questionnaires was used.

3.3. Procedure and Data Analysis

The participants were asked to complete the strategy inventory concurrently with the background questionnaire in their regular classes. There was no limitation of time and it took about 25 minutes for students to score all the items in the two questionnaires. The gathered data were subjected to a three-way ANOVA ($2 \times 2 \times 2$) to see whether motivation types (instrumental and integrative), attitude (positive and negative), and years of study (freshman and senior) had any effects on the choice of language learning strategies by the subjects.

4. Result and Discussion

The participants' reported preferences of LLSs measured by strategy questionnaire are presented here in the form of mean scores for each strategy (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social) and the three independent variables of the study (attitude, motivation, and years of study). The possible scores for all strategy groups ranged from 1 to 5. This is tabulated in Table 4.

Table 4: Mean scores of different groups of participants on different strategies.

Variable Factor	Attitude		Motivation		Years of Study		Whole Sample
	Neg	Pos	Intg	Inst	Fresh	Senior	
Memory	3.22	3.50	3.44	3.28	3.31	3.44	3.37
Cognitive	3.27	3.51	3.56	3.22	3.24	3.59	3.40
Compensation	3.51	3.85	3.73	3.65	3.57	3.84	3.69
Metacognitive	4.20	4.29	4.27	4.21	4.24	4.25	4.24
Affective	3.64	3.79	3.80	3.63	3.60	3.86	3.72
Social	3.67	3.79	3.85	3.59	3.68	3.79	3.73
Total	3.55	3.76	3.75	3.55	3.57	3.77	3.66

Neg= Negative

Pos= Positive

Intg= Integrative

Inst= Instrumental

Fresh= Freshman

In her scale, Oxford (1990) classified strategy users into three groups based on their mean scores on the strategy questionnaire. Learners with the mean score of 3.5 or more were considered as high strategy users. The mean score below 2.4 put the participants into low strategy users group. Participants with the mean score between 2.4 and 3.5 were considered as medium strategy users. Referring to Table 4, the participants in this study reported to be high strategy users regarding the total use of LLSs (3.66). Metacognitive (4.24), social (3.73), affective (3.72), and compensation (3.69) strategies received higher mean scores. Cognitive (3.40) and memory (3.37) strategies were reported to be used at a medium level. None of the six groups of strategies was reported to be employed at a low level of frequency. In the present study, Iranian EFL university students reported to apply metacognitive strategies most and memory strategies least frequently. Metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process and evaluating how well one has learned. The reason for the more frequent use of these strategies can be the EFL context of learning English in Iran. Metacognitive strategies provide control over the learning process. Since EFL students are more conscious about their L2 development, they apply those strategies which help them to have control over their learning.

The high scores in the social and affective areas, as compared with the lower results in cognitive strategy use, suggest that Iranian EFL learners are more feeling-oriented rather than thinking-oriented. A feeling-focused student is concerned with social and emotional factors but does not make decisions based on logic and analysis. Regarding

the high score in compensation strategies, the reason can be the EFL situation with insufficient language input. As Kouraogo (1993) states, EFL students learn English in an “input poor environment”, so they have to use compensation strategies to communicate successfully with others. Concerning the overall use of LLSs, the results of this study showed that no strategy was applied with low frequency by Iranian EFL language learners. It seems congruent with what Kouraogo (1993) has stated concerning EFL learners use of strategies more than ESL students.

In order to see the effects of motivation type (integrative and instrumental), attitude (positive and negative), and years of study (freshman and senior) on the use of language learning strategies, an ANOVA was run. The results are presented in the following table.

Table 5: Analysis of variance: total strategy by attitude, motivation, and years of study.

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Squares	F-Value	Significance of F
Main Effects	2.931	3	0.977	9.065	0.000
Attitude	1.016	1	1.016	9.425	0.003
Motivation	0.331	1	0.331	3.067	0.082
Grade Level	0.647	1	0.647	6.000	0.016
2-Way Interactions Attitude, Motivation	0.499	1	0.499	4.625	0.034
2-Way Interactions Attitude, Grade Level	0.141	1	0.141	0.310	0.255
2-Way Interactions Motivation, Grade Level	0.000	1	0.000	0.004	0.952
3-Way Interactions Attitude Motivation, and Grade Level	0.045	1	0.045	0.418	0.519

Taking total use of strategies into account, the ANOVA results presented in Table 5 indicate that attitude and grade level significantly differentiate between the subjects participating in this study. There is also an interaction between attitude and motivation at $P < 0.05$. For motivation and grade level, there is not any significant effect at $p < 0.05$. No other interaction is seen in this category either.

In this study, the effects of attitude on the choice of LLSs were found to be significant. Students with positive attitude used LLSs more frequently than those holding negative attitude. The same result was found in some similar studies (Yang, 1993; Sedaghat, 2001). Since learners with positive attitude try to become a member of the target language community, they do their best to know more about the techniques or strategies which can help them acquire a better command of the target language. This might be a reasonable justification for the more frequent use of LLSs by the participants holding positive attitude in this study.

With regard to the obtained results, years of study proved to have a significant effect on strategy choice. In the present study, seniors (3.77) showed greater use of LLSs than freshmen (3.57). This can be explained by the fact that seniors have more experience in learning the target language in comparison with freshmen. During the four years of study, seniors gain much awareness about different strategies which are at their disposal. Furthermore, they become familiar with various techniques or strategies which facilitate learning the target language.

5. Conclusion

Analysis of the obtained results led to the following conclusions in this study:

1. The participants in this study reported to employ metacognitive, social, affective, and compensation strategies more frequently than cognitive and memory strategies.
2. Iranian EFL university students' choice of LLSs was proved to be influenced by the type of their attitude. That is, learners who had positive attitude used these strategies more frequently than those with negative attitude.
3. Motivation was not found to have a significant effect on LLSs at $p < .05$ level.
4. Years of study, the third variable of the study, proved to affect LLSs significantly. That is, seniors showed greater use of these strategies than freshmen.

6. Pedagogical Implication

The present study has led to the following implication for teaching and learning English. Most students seem unfamiliar with the efficiency of LLSs. It is the duty of language teachers to familiarize them with LLSs and incorporate strategy training into teaching programs (O'Malley and Chamot, 1995). Teaching learners how to learn is believed to be of paramount importance in making learning in general, and language learning in particular, more effective. The purpose of such training is to provide learners with the strategies of learning a language, and an awareness of how and when to use such techniques most effectively. Strategy training is based on the belief that it is possible to develop in the learners the ability to take charge of their own learning so that eventually they can become independent of the teacher.

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