Language Learning Strategy Use among Iranian Engineering EFL Learners

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Abstract
The present study aimed at understanding the language learning strategy use of Iranian EFL learners’ about learning a foreign language. The main purpose of the study was to understand if there was any relationship between proficiency level, gender and extra education in language institutes and strategy use. To achieve this end, 369 engineering students were selected based on random sampling in Azad University of Tabriz, Iran. Data were collected using two questionnaires: a demographical questionnaire and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). ANOVA, LSD & t-test were used for analyzing the data. The results of the study indicated highest mean average of metacognitive (M=3.57), followed by social (M=3.27), cognitive (M=3.12), compensation (M=3.07), memory (M=2.89) and affective (M=2.84) strategies. Furthermore, the results indicated a significant difference among learners’ strategy use, proficiency level and extra education in language institutes. Nevertheless, no significant difference was found between learners’ strategy use and gender. The study ended with some pedagogical implications.

Keywords: Iranian EFL engineering learners, SILL

1. Introduction
Individualism, where individual values and differences were recognized and respected, burgeoned during second half of the twentieth century. The shift of attention from considering human beings as physical identities to considering them as totality of physical, cognitive and affective variables has changed the way education is considered. The studies related to individual differences in learning are well documented (Brown, 2007; Dornyei, 2007, 2009; Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2007; Ellis, 2012; Shehan, 1989). It has been more than three decades that researchers have tried to establish a direct relationship among different individual factors and measures of L2 learning. Language learning strategies, being an essential key factor in language learning have attracted lots of attention these days due to the cognitive revolution from behaviorism to cognitive science in psychology. (Nahavandi & Mukundan, 2014). The attention on the characteristics of a good language learner (Rubin & Thompson, 1994; Stern, 1975) and a shift of interest from the teacher to the learner (Ellis, 2012; Nahavandi, 2011; Nahavandi & Mukundan, 2012) as well as shift of focus from product oriented learning to process oriented one (Nahavandi, 2013; Nahavandi & Mukundan, 2013a, Nahavandi & Mukundan, 2013b; Nahavandi & Mukundan, 2013c ), has directed the attention to learning strategies that individual learners apply during the learning process (Wenden, 1991). To put it in another way, the main concern of the second or foreign language researchers has been on how the learners process new information and the kinds of strategies they employ in learning, understanding, or remembering these information. For Palmer & Goetz, (1988) learners’ knowledge of their learning influences the way and the result of their own learning. Furthermore, as Nisbet & Shucksmith, (1986) claim learners’ understanding of learning strategies affects their choice of strategies. Although there have been numerous studies in strategies of learning, to date, to the researcher’s best knowledge, no comparative study was found on a sample of non-English major students majoring in fields other than English. Besides, no related study was found researching whether university students in Iran with and without extra education in language institutes differ with each other in terms of their strategy use or not. Thus, the present research attempts to fill this gap by investigating Iranian students majoring in fields other than English, hoping that such a study might provide useful information in Iranian context.

2. Background of Study
As it was mentioned before, during past thirty years, there has been a plenty of research on the role that learning strategies play in second or foreign language learning. For Oxford (1990) “learning strategies are important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement” (p.1). Many researchers believe that learning strategies can enhance learners’ autonomy in learning a language (Holec, 1981) which in turn can assist them to promote their own achievement in language proficiency (Bremmer, 1998; Griffiths, 2003; Chang, 2010; Lee, 2008;
O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, & KÜpper, 1985). Thus, it is claimed that learning strategies can help learners to more become efficient in learning and using a language.

Strategies have been defined as conscious techniques for achieving goals and are shown to mediate cognitive changes. For Oxford (1990) language-learning strategies are “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). For Chamot & Kupper (1989) learning strategies are “techniques which students use to comprehend, store, and remember new information and skills” (p.13). Lots of effort has been made to classify the strategies that learners use (Rubin, 1981; Cohen, 1998). O’Malley and Chamot (1990), classify the use of strategies based on a three-way distinction between cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective learning strategies. Studies in learner strategies fall into two basic categories of descriptive studies and intervention studies. Descriptive studies define features of a good language learner (Reiss, 1985; Vann & Abraham, 1990) and the total number of strategies that learners or group of learners utilize. Intervention studies, on the other hand, deal with the process of learner training by teachers or researchers to decide whether it is feasible to bring about any change in the learners’ strategy use or not (Ghabanchi & Meidani, 2012).

Although there are many researchers researching strategies for language learning, Oxford’s approach (1990) is useful as she uses a simple taxonomy dividing strategies into two major groups of direct and indirect strategies (Fotos, 2001). In her classification, each category is divided into subcategories showing the special strategies fitting under the labels. Direct strategies relating directly to learning or producing the target language are subdivided into memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. All of these strategies include conscious manipulation of the target language structure. For example, memory strategies include retrieving and storing new information, while cognitive strategies include practicing new language items, analyzing new material, and organizing structure for new material. Besides, compensation strategies include overcoming missing knowledge of a target language. Indirect strategies are the ones which enable the students to control learning, helping direct strategies to occur and/or increase their successful application. Indirect strategies include: metacognitive strategies for managing the cognitive process, affective strategies for controlling emotions in language learning and developing motivation, and social strategies for interacting with others and collaborative creation of meaning (Fotos, 2001). For Ellis (1994) O’Malley and Chamot’s (1990) and Oxford’s (1990) systems have been evolved from strong theoretical roots describing metacognitive and cognitive strategies in a more explicit and clear way compared to earlier work.

Some researchers (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Khamkhien, 2010; Deneme, 2008; Fuping, 2006; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995) have studied some learner specific variables such as different learning contexts, language proficiency, age, gender, cultural and educational backgrounds, motivation, anxiety, attitude, aptitude, autonomy, beliefs about language learning, self-rated language proficiency, which can influence learners’ language learning strategy use.

2.1 SILL research in EFL Contexts

Lots of studies have been conducted on strategies of learning in EFL context (Bilaystok, 2001; Hashemi, 2011; Nikoopour, Amini-Farsani & Neishabouri, 2011; Oh, 1992; Rubin, 1981; Sheorey, 1999; Wong, 2005; Zare, 2010). In the Iranian EFL context, Zare (2010) examined the pattern and frequency of strategy use among Iranian undergraduate students. The results showed that they are medium strategy users. Hashemi (2011) investigated the effect of gender in the strategy use of Iranian EFL students. His study results showed that female students are more frequent users of affective and compensatory strategies compared to their male counterparts. The study done by Nikoopour, et.al (2011) showed that Iranian MA TEFL students use metacognitive strategy more than other strategies. In the most recent study, Salahshour, Shariff, & Salahshour (2013) studied the relationship between language learning strategy use, language proficiency level and learner gender with 65 high school students. The results of their study indicated that Iranian high school learners were medium users of strategy with gender and proficiency level playing a significant effect on their use of strategies.

Although as mentioned above, some studies have been conducted on Iranian EFL students, to researcher’s best knowledge, no study has been done on a sample of non-English major students majoring in fields other than English. Besides, no study was found comparing university students in Iran with and without extra education in language institutes. Thus, the present research attempts to fill this gap by investigating Iranian students majoring in fields other than English and extra education in language institutes.

3. The Study

Generally speaking, the present study aimed at understanding the strategy use of Iranian engineering EFL learners. Based on the objectives of the study the following research questions are raised:

1) What are the language-learning strategies of Iranian engineering EFL learners? Are there any similarities or differences in the use of learning strategies among them?
2) Does gender affect the use of language learning strategies significantly?
3) Does self-rated proficiency level affect the use of language learning strategies significantly?
4) Does extra education in language institutes affect the use of language learning strategies significantly?
3.1 Participants

403 Iranian engineering EFL learners studying general English course in Azad University of Tabriz, Iran during the academic year of 2013 were selected based on random sampling. The selected respondents were given a demographical questionnaire together with (SILL), Strategy Inventory for Language Learning. Only 369 complete questionnaires out of 403 were fed into SPSS for analysis. The respondents’ age ranged from 18-41 with the average mean of 19.04. Considering extra education in language institutes 196 (53.1) were students with extra education while 173 (46.9) were students without extra education. Considering their gender, 213 were male (57.7) and 156 were female (42.3) students. Considering their self-rated proficiency level, 106 (28.7) were beginners, 209 (56.6) were intermediate and the rest 54 (14.6) were advanced students.

3.2 Instruments: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

Oxford (1990) developed SILL in order to measure the frequency of use of the language-learning strategies of adult learners learning a foreign language. It has been the most widely used instrument tested and translated in many countries for identifying strategies that EFL/ESL learners use in learning a second or foreign language (Brown, 2001). Oxford developed two different versions of SILL, one for native English speakers learning a foreign language containing 80 items (Version 5.0) and another for ESL or EFL learners containing 50 items (Version 7.0). In her classification, she groups learners’ different strategies into memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Being a self-report questionnaire, the 50 items in SILL are grouped into six categories of memory (9 items), cognitive (14 items), compensation (6 items), metacognitive (9 items), affective, motivation (6 items), and social (6 items) strategies. The SILL uses a five-point Likert-scale system for each strategy ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = never true of me to 5 = always true of me. The language use is divided into three levels of high, medium and low usage. The mean of high usage varies between 4.5 to 5 or usually used with a mean of 3.5 to 4.4. The mean of medium usage varies between 2.5 to 3.4. And the mean of low usage varies from 1.5 to 2.4 or never used with a mean of 1.0-1.40. Studies on the SILL have reported high reliability (above .90).

3.3 Procedure

Since the respondents were EFL students studying general English course at the university, the given SILL questionnaire was translated into Persian language. Then, the translated questionnaire was checked by a Persian language lecturer in Tabriz Azad University to ascertain that the items retained their meaning. Next, it was back translated into English by a second Persian lecturer to test for inaccuracies and ambiguities. In order to calculate reliability of the items, a pilot study was carried out with 30 pre-intermediate students at Jahad-e -Daneshgahi institute. After checking the reliability, and getting permission from the dean of engineering faculty, the translated questionnaire was administered and the respondents were given 25 minutes to fill up the questionnaire. The researcher herself was present in data collection procedure, therefore assistance and guidance was provided in case of any ambiguity or problem in understanding the questionnaire items. Respondents were ascertained about the confidentiality of their information.

4. Results of the Study

Minimum, Maximum, Mean, Std. Deviation, Variance, Skewness, and Kurtosis were calculated for all the variables. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was used to test the normality of data for SILL. As the significant level was bigger than 0.05, parametric statistics was used.

Table 1. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

| N   | Normal Parameters | Most Extreme Differences | Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-----|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
|     | Mean              | Std. Deviation           | Absolute Positive   | Negative               |                        |
| Memory | 369               | 2.8853                   | .59140               | .051                   | .051                   | -.048                 | .987                   | .285                   |
| Cognitive | 369               | 3.1177                   | .63886               | .052                   | .034                   | -.052                 | 1.005                  | .265                   |
| Compensation | 369               | 3.0723                   | .69345               | .069                   | .058                   | -.069                 | 1.326                  | .059                   |
| Metacognitive | 369               | 3.5709                   | .78482               | .093                   | .049                   | -.093                 | 1.792                  | .053                   |
| Affective | 369               | 2.8356                   | .67146               | .076                   | .076                   | -.049                 | 1.457                  | .062                   |
| Social | 369               | 3.2715                   | .88670               | .068                   | .059                   | -.068                 | 1.308                  | .065                   |
| SILI | 369               | 3.1358                   | .55479               | .053                   | .040                   | -.053                 | 1.023                  | .246                   |

4.1 Overall Strategy Use

The responses of participants in each group (High, Medium, and Low Usage) have been brought up in Table 6. As can be seen from the tables, Iranian engineering EFL learners are medium users of strategies. Taking into the consideration the six factors of SILL, they are also medium users of memory (58%), cognitive (55.3%), compensation (50.9%), affective (52%) strategies but high users in metacognitive (59.3%) and social (43.4%) strategies.
| Table 2. SILL                      | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid                            |           |         |               |                    |
| Low Usage                        | 47        | 12.7    | 12.7          | 12.7               |
| Medium Usage                     | 215       | 58.3    | 58.3          | 71.0               |
| High Usage                       | 107       | 29.0    | 29.0          | 100.0              |
| Total                            | 369       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

| Table 3. Memory                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid                            |           |         |               |                    |
| Low Usage                        | 91        | 24.7    | 24.7          | 24.7               |
| Medium Usage                     | 214       | 58.0    | 58.0          | 82.7               |
| High Usage                       | 64        | 17.3    | 17.3          | 100.0              |
| Total                            | 369       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

| Table 4. Cognitive               | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid                            |           |         |               |                    |
| Low Usage                        | 59        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 16.0               |
| Medium Usage                     | 204       | 55.3    | 55.3          | 71.3               |
| High Usage                       | 106       | 28.7    | 28.7          | 100.0              |
| Total                            | 369       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

| Table 5. Compensation            | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid                            |           |         |               |                    |
| Low Usage                        | 62        | 16.8    | 16.8          | 16.8               |
| Medium Usage                     | 188       | 50.9    | 50.9          | 67.8               |
| High Usage                       | 119       | 32.2    | 32.2          | 100.0              |
| Total                            | 369       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

| Table 6. Metacognitive           | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid                            |           |         |               |                    |
| Low Usage                        | 41        | 11.1    | 11.1          | 11.1               |
| Medium Usage                     | 109       | 29.5    | 29.5          | 40.7               |
| High Usage                       | 219       | 59.3    | 59.3          | 100.0              |
| Total                            | 369       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

| Table 7. Affective               | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid                            |           |         |               |                    |
| Low Usage                        | 100       | 27.1    | 27.1          | 27.1               |
| Medium Usage                     | 192       | 52.0    | 52.0          | 79.1               |
| High Usage                       | 77        | 20.9    | 20.9          | 100.0              |
| Total                            | 369       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |
4.2 Descriptive Statistics for all six Factors of SILL

The results of the study showed that the highest mean average among the six components of SILL about language learning was metacognitive (M=3.57), followed by social (M=3.27), cognitive (M=3.12), compensation (M=3.07), memory (M=2.89) and affective (M=2.84) strategies. See table 1 for more information.

4.2 Comparing Components of SILL through t-test

Independent t-test was used with the test value of 3 in order to understand the use of strategies in language learning. The results of t-test indicated that strategies of cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, and social are significantly higher than average. Means are higher than 3, and significant level is <0.05. However, the use of memory & affective strategies are significantly lower than average, and significant level is <0.05.
4.3 Ranking SILL based on all six components

Friedman Test was used in order to rank amount of strategy use. The overall mean as well as mean of all ranks of variables were calculated, the variable with the lowest use receiving lowest rank. Based on the results, Chi-square = 387.95, df = 5, and level of significance was 0.000. As level of sig was < 0.05, it could be concluded that there was a significant difference between mean of variable ranks. Means of SILL from lowest to highest are: affective, memory, compensation, cognitive, social and metacognitive.

Table 12. Friedman Test

| Variable      | N  | Mean | Mean Rank | Chi-square | df | Asymp. Sig. |
|---------------|----|------|-----------|------------|----|-------------|
| Memory        | 369| 2.89 | 2.80      | 387.954    | 5  | .000        |
| Cognitive     | 369| 3.12 | 3.49      |            |    |             |
| Compensation  | 369| 3.07 | 3.35      |            |    |             |
| Metacognitive | 369| 3.57 | 4.97      |            |    |             |
| Affective     | 369| 2.84 | 2.58      |            |    |             |
| Social        | 369| 3.27 | 3.81      |            |    |             |

4.4 Comparing SILL based on gender & self-rated proficiency level

MANOVA was used in order compare SILL with gender and self-rated proficiency level. Wilks' Lambda approach was used to analyze gender in two levels and proficiency in three levels of elementary, intermediate and advance levels. The results of the study indicated that the effect of gender was not significant (sig > 0.05) meaning, there was not any significant difference between male and female students in their SILL. However, the effect of proficiency level was significant (sig < 0.05). The interaction between gender and proficiency level was significant. The results showed that affective & social strategies among females were significantly higher than males (sig < 0.05). But there wasn’t any significant difference between males & females in the use of other strategies. There was a significant difference between use of strategies, (except memory strategy) and different proficiency level, (sig. <0.05). The interaction between gender and proficiency level was only significant in memory strategy.

Table 13. Descriptive Statistics

| Gender                      | Mean   | Std. Deviation | N  | Mean   | Std. Deviation | N  | Total   | Mean   | Std. Deviation | N  |
|-----------------------------|--------|----------------|----|--------|----------------|----|---------|--------|----------------|----|
| proficiency level           |        |                |    |        |                |    |         |        |                |    |
| Memory                      |        |                |    |        |                |    |         |        |                |    |
| Beginning                   | 2.5912 | .57679         | 78 | 3.0278 | .59997         | 28 | 2.7065  | .61151 | 106             |
| Intermediate                | 2.9078 | .59697         | 106| 3.0043 | .57037         | 103| 2.9553  | .58462 | 209             |
| Advanced                    | 3.0728 | .53557         | 29 | 2.8400 | .44914         | 25 | 2.9650  | .50657 | 54              |
| Total                       | 2.8143 | .60585         | 213| 2.9822 | .55856         | 156| 2.8853  | .59140 | 369             |
| Cognitive                   |        |                |    |        |                |    |         |        |                |    |
| Beginning                   | 2.7244 | .54614         | 78 | 2.8367 | .76038         | 28 | 2.7540  | .60818 | 106             |
| Intermediate                | 3.1152 | .63065         | 106| 3.3370 | .54906         | 103| 3.2245  | .60080 | 209             |
| Advanced                    | 3.3793 | .63346         | 29 | 3.4629 | .39130         | 25 | 3.4180  | .53207 | 54              |
| Total                       | 3.0080 | .64228         | 213| 3.2674 | .60473         | 156| 3.1177  | .63886 | 369             |
| Compensation                |        |                |    |        |                |    |         |        |                |    |
| Beginning                   | 2.7714 | .71880         | 78 | 2.9762 | .78004         | 28 | 2.8255  | .73728 | 106             |
| Intermediate                | 3.0157 | .69978         | 106| 3.2686 | .65022         | 103| 3.1404  | .68600 | 209             |
| Advanced                    | 3.3218 | .53067         | 29 | 3.2600 | .40848         | 25 | 3.2932  | .47466 | 54              |
Table 14. Multivariate Tests

| Effect | Value | F     | Hypothesis df | Error df | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|--------|-------|-------|---------------|----------|------|---------------------|
| Gender Wilks' Lambda | .972 | 1.716 | 6.000 | 358.000 | .116 | .028                |
| p.level Wilks' Lambda | .870 | 4.289 | 12.000 | 716.000 | .000 | .067                |
| Gender * p.level Wilks' Lambda | .941 | 1.851 | 12.000 | 716.000 | .037 | .030                |

Table 15. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

| Source | Dependent Variable | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F     | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|--------|--------------------|--------------------------|----|-------------|-------|------|---------------------|
| Gender Memory | .635 | 1 | .635 | 1.939 | .165 | .005 |
| Cognitive | 1.227 | 1 | 1.227 | 3.536 | .061 | .010 |
| Compensation | 1.102 | 1 | 1.102 | 2.460 | .118 | .007 |
| Metacognitive affective | .405 | 1 | .405 | .717 | .398 | .002 |
| Social | 3.325 | 1 | 3.325 | 4.687 | .031 | .013 |
| p.level Memory | 1.349 | 2 | .674 | 2.061 | .129 | .011 |
| Cognitive | 16.407 | 2 | 8.203 | 23.634 | .000 | .115 |
| Compensation | 6.546 | 2 | 3.273 | 7.305 | .001 | .039 |
| Metacognitive Affective | 15.056 | 2 | 7.528 | 13.331 | .000 | .068 |
| Social | 3.876 | 2 | 1.938 | 4.521 | .011 | .024 |
| Gender * Memory | 3.761 | 2 | 1.881 | 5.746 | .003 | .031 |
| p.level Cognitive | .307 | 2 | .154 | .443 | .643 | .002 |
| Compensation | 1.062 | 2 | .531 | 1.185 | .307 | .006 |
| Metacognitive Affective | .232 | 2 | .116 | .205 | .814 | .001 |
| Social | .713 | 2 | .357 | .503 | .605 | .003 |

Table 16. Multiple Comparisons LSD

| Dependent Variable | (I) proficiency level | (J) proficiency level | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. |
|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------|------|
| Cognitive Beginning | Intermediate | -.4705* | .07025 | .000 |
| Intermediate Advanced | -.6639* | .09850 | .000 |
| Advanced Beginning | .4705* | .07025 | .000 |
| Intermediate Advanced | -.1935* | .08994 | .032 |
| Advanced Beginning | .6639* | .09850 | .000 |
Comparing SILL based on extra education in language institutes

In order to compare SILL between those with/without extra education in language MANOVA was employed using Wilks' Lambda approach. The results of the study indicated that the effect of group was significant (sig < 0.05). On the whole, SILL among extra education students were more than the other group. The results of univariate showed that, the use of all strategies among extra education group was significantly higher than no education group (sig < 0.05).

Table 17. Descriptive Statistics

| Group     | Mean  | Std. Deviation | N  |
|-----------|-------|----------------|----|
| Memory    |       |                |    |
| No education | 2.7489     | .64362         | 173   |
| Further education | 3.0057 | .51342         | 196   |
| Total     | 2.8853 | .59140         | 369   |
| Cognitive |       |                |    |
| No education | 2.8885     | .66892         | 173   |
| Further education | 3.3200 | .53650         | 196   |
| Total     | 3.1177 | .63886         | 369   |
| Compensation |       |                |    |
| No education | 2.9143     | .74873         | 173   |
| Further education | 3.2117 | .60936         | 196   |
| Total     | 3.0723 | .69345         | 369   |
| Metacognitive |       |                |    |
| No education | 3.3327     | .82789         | 173   |
| Further education | 3.7812 | .68048         | 196   |
| Total     | 3.5709 | .78482         | 369   |
| Affective |       |                |    |
| No education | 2.5896     | .59049         | 173   |
| Further education | 3.0527 | .66500         | 196   |
| Total     | 2.8356 | .67146         | 369   |
| Social    |       |                |    |
| No education | 2.9422     | .84595         | 173   |
| Further education | 3.5621 | .81944         | 196   |
| Total     | 3.2715 | .88670         | 369   |

Table 18. Multivariate Tests

| Effect    | Value  | F      | Hypothesis df | Error df | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|-----------|--------|--------|---------------|----------|------|---------------------|
| Group     | Wilks' Lambda | 0.828 | 12.543 | 6.000 | 362.000 | 0.000 | 0.172       |
5. Discussion

Iranian EFL students utilized different language learning strategies. On the whole, Iranian EFL learners are medium users of strategies. Taking into consideration the six factors of SILL, they are also medium users of memory (58%), cognitive (55.3%), compensation (50.9%), and affective (52%) strategies but they are high users in metacognitive (59.3%) and social (43.4%) strategies.

Here, strategy use among Iranian EFL learners has been brought up in descending order from most to the least used ones and the possible rationale for the results is given. For Iranian EFL students, the six underlying factors determined to be of the greatest importance during the language learning process were metacognitive (M=3.57), followed by social (M=3.27), cognitive (M=3.12), compensation (M=3.07), memory (M=2.89) and affective (M=2.84) strategies. Among the six categories of strategies, the metacognitive strategies were used more than other ones. Furthermore, the results showed that the effect of gender was not significant (sig > 0.05). However, the effect of proficiency level and group (with/without extra education in language institutes was significant (sig < 0.05). On the whole, strategy use among extra education students was higher than the other group (sig < 0.05).

Considering the use of metacognitive as the most dominant strategy, the results of the present study is in line with Hong-Name and Leavell (2007), Nikoopour (2011), Salahshour, et.al (2013), Sheorey (1999), and Vossoughi and Ebrahimi (2003). Furthermore as social strategy was ranked the second frequently used strategy, the results contradicts with the findings of Polizter & Chamot (1990), whose findings showed that Asian second language learners utilize more language rules and rote learning and less communicative strategies.

Considering gender differences in language-learning strategy use, most of the studies have reported higher use of strategies by females than males. The results of the present study contradict with the studies by (Bacon, 1992; Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Green and Oxford, 1995; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Polizter, 1983; Salahshour, et.al (2013); Vandergriff, 1997) in which females showed more frequent use of learning strategies than males. Besides, the results of the present study contradict with Tran (1988) and Wharton’s (2000) whose research reported higher use of strategies by males than females. However, the results of the present study is in line with Al-Otaibi, (2004) who reported that gender did not affect the use of language-learning strategies significanly. For some researchers, gender difference in strategy use can be the result of genetic predispositions to certain kinds of behaviors such as reflective thinking related to metacognition or socialization, related causes such as social roles, culturally-specific behaviors, learning styles, language learning experience, socialization, life experience and verbal aptitude, all of which may in turn influence language learning in the classroom.

Considering proficiency level, some studies have investigated the relationship between self-rated proficiency level and strategy use, reporting different findings. Oxford & Nyikos (1989) state that the higher the proficiency level, the greater the strategy use is. For Wharton (2000), the relationship between proficiency level and strategy use is “two-way” with proficiency affecting strategy use and vice versa. The result of the present study is in line with Oxford & Nyikos (1989), Salahshour, et.al (2013), and Wharton (2000), meaning the more proficient the learners are, the higher they use the strategies. Considering extra education in language institutes, to date, no related study was found.

6. Conclusion & Implications of the Study

The present study was an attempt to understand the strategy use of Iranian EFL learners’ along gender, different proficiency levels and extra education in language institutes. The results of the study indicated that Iranian EFL learners were medium users of strategies. For Oxford (1990) "language learning strategies encourage greater overall self direction" and "......self-directed students gradually gain greater confidence, involvement, and proficiency" (p.10). Therefore, in order to assist the Iranian EFL learners to be high users of strategies and to be more self-directed teachers can add language learning strategy instruction into the curriculum and give opportunities for students to try using language learning strategies on especial learning tasks. As (Su & Duo, 2012) claim it could be a good idea if teachers could encourage students in trying different language learning strategies, and understanding their own personal set of language learning strategy combinations. Therefore, in order to gain success in language learning they may apply them frequently and successfully in different language situations. Considering extra education in language institutes, use of learning strategies were more among extra education group. As Nahavandi & Mukundan (2014) claim the differences in use of strategies between these two groups can be due to vastly different educational environments. Private language
institute students “possess certain skills, strategies, understandings or beliefs that may enable them to approach the process of language learning more effectively than those studying in a university” (p.178). Based on the obtained results the following pedagogical implications can be made. First, by understanding strategy use of Iranian EFL learners’, teachers and educators can better understand the situation of EFL learners in Iran and they can raise awareness of EFL learners to select and use more appropriate strategies at different stages of learning. This in turn can increase the teachers’ awareness of respecting individual differences among language learners. Teachers can train their students to utilize appropriate strategies for a specific purpose or a specific skill area. Furthermore, they can encourage them to use the strategies as frequently as possible in order to improve their language skills (Zare, 2012).

Syllabus designers and material developers can incorporate modifications into books, activities, and tasks that not only increase the use of learning strategies, but also provide opportunities in using such strategies. Nevertheless, caution is required in interpreting the results of the present study to other populations with different ethnic, linguistic, or educational backgrounds.

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