

Students' Attitudes towards Strategies Use in Learning English as a Foreign Language. A Case Study of the Algerian Teachers' Training School

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Abstract:

This paper reports the findings of the study that assesses strategies use among Algerian Teachers' Training School Students (ENSB) who are studying English as a foreign language. This study seeks to investigate students' attitudes to language learning strategies. The two main questions addressed are: what are Algerian students' attitudes towards strategies use? And which types of strategy are most frequently used among these students? To answer these questions, a total of 85 students enrolled in third year responded to 50 items in an inventory for language learning strategies. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) has been used to gather data from the participants. The results revealed that the participants highly employ the metacognitive strategies, moderately the cognitive, the compensation strategies, the social, affective, and lastly memory strategies. The implications of the results are that the teachers are required to consider their students' strategies use in their teaching practices in order to implement a more effective teaching.

Keywords:

Language Learning Strategies; Second Language Acquisition; Strategies Assesment; Strategies investment; Strategies Inventory Language Learning

1. INTRODUCTION:

Improving the quality of teaching and learning foreign languages has been of prime concern for specialists and researchers in the field of education. Many theories and approaches appeared in the field of Education approaching teaching and learning from different perspectives which led to divergent pedagogies. Basically, this mismatch in pedagogies, to a greater extent, emanated from the focus on the one of the basic two elements included in the teaching- learning process; the teacher or the learner. While tradition teaching focuses on the teacher as the central element in the teaching and learning process (Scrivener 2000), The new pedagogy focuses on the “learner own personal investment” Brown (2002, p.12). According to Brown “successful mastery of the second language will be, to a large extent, the result of a learner’s own personal “investment” of time, effort, and attention to the second language in the form of an individualized battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language.” (Brown cited in Richards and Renandya 2002, p.12). This implies that the new pedagogy places a great emphasis on the learner, and the learners’ learning strategies are at the heart of the learning process. Learners who use strategies in their learning are considered as “autonomous” (Cohen 2011, p.33), “self-directed” (Oxford, 1990, p.9) and responsible for their learning. In fact, research in the field of learning strategies brought about many conclusive results as it stresses the essential participation of the learner in the learning process and that learning occurs only when the learner takes in charge his/ her learning. Learners, within this view, are no more seen as empty receptacles receiving information from the teacher as used to be in the traditional pedagogy (Scrivener, 2005), but active participants in the teaching and learning process. However, this shift in the learners’ roles and responsibilities from receivers to participants imposes shift in teachers’ roles and responsibilities as well. Teachers’ main role in this new pedagogy is facilitating the learning process as oppose to being the only source of knowledge

(Harmer, 2001). Thus, for a more reconciled pedagogy, teachers are required to consider their students' different ways of learning and more particularly their differences in the use of the learning strategies through what is known in the literature by strategies assessment in order adjust their teaching practices to their students' needs and preferences. Assessing students' learning strategies is prerequisite to implement effective teaching. Thus, teachers are required to assess students' actual use of strategies in their learning of English as a foreign language before engaging in the teaching practices. In fact, there has been a great interest on learning strategies (Cohen 2011; Oxford 1990, 1996, 2011; Chamot 1999 ; Brown 2002) and strategies assessment may reveal about how students learn. The purpose of this study is to find out about the use of the learning strategies among Algerian EFL students. The following research questions that guide this study are as follows: what are the Algerian students' attitudes towards strategies use? And which types of strategies are most frequently used by these students? To answer these research questions, a survey design has been used in which the Strategies Inventory Language Learning (SILL) has been used as the main instrument to collect data from the participants.

2. Literature Review

2.1 - Language Learning Strategies

The recent research studies in the field of education stress the importance of strategies use and strategies instruction in facilitating the teaching and the learning process. Language learning strategies becomes an outstanding field of research in education specially with the work of Rebecca L.Oxford (1990, 2011), Andrew D. Cohen(2007) Chamot and O'Malley J.Michael (1994). In fact, Learning strategies refer to the specific actions that the learners often take when they learn. In her attempt to define learning strategies, Oxford reported that learning strategies are "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier faster, more enjoyable,

more self directed, more effective and more transferrable to new situations.”(1990, p.8). Cohen (2011), in his definition of learning strategies, focused on the feature of “consciousness” as an essential characteristic of learning strategies which according to him “distinguishes strategies from those processes that are not” (p.7). In this view, learning strategies are conscious actions taken by the learner in order to facilitate his learning .Accordingly, one main purpose of language learning strategies is to promote learners’ self-direction where learner can take appropriate personal decisions to solve problems. Thus, this new pedagogy stresses the essential participation of the learner in the learning process and that learning occurs only when the learner takes in charge his/ her learning.

Actually, different classifications of language learning strategies exist; however, Oxfords’ taxonomy of foreign language strategies is the most comprehensive taxonomy in language practice (Brown, 2000). Language learning strategies, according to Oxford’s (1990) taxonomy, are of two types: **direct strategies and indirect strategies**. Direct strategies are the strategies that are directly applied by the learner to learn a language and require mental processing of the language. They include three main macro-strategies; namely: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. The indirect strategies do not directly involve in the language learning but support the learning process. They consist of meta-cognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies

This classification of strategies into direct and indirect strategies is very important in the teaching practices as long as it enables the teachers assess their students’ use of the learning strategies. The Oxford’s (1990) Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), an inventory that consist of the six previously mentioned strategies, is an efficient method that enables teachers to assess the students’ use of the learning strategies and can reveal about the types of the strategies students

actually use when learning. Oxford (1990) reported that the aim of assessing students learning strategies is to provide training on how to improve these strategies.

2.2-Assessing Learners' learning strategies

Basically, it is commonly agreed that individuals differ in their learning. Research in psychology showed that this difference “has been equated to personality and intelligence” (Dornyei, 2005, p.7). However, the concept of Individual Differences, according to the same reference, contains many variables. Dornyei (2007) reported that in the field of second language, *learning styles* and *learning strategies* have been considered as key factors in Individual Differences. Similarly research in the field of learning strategies showed that one main feature of learning strategies is that they are “specific actions taken by the learner” (Oxford, 1990, p.9) which makes learners use different strategies when learning new knowledge. Accordingly, these strategies are assessable (Oxford, 1990).

In fact, assessing learning strategies is of major concern in language learning and has many pedagogical implications. By assessing students' use of strategies, teachers can provide the best practices to make learning easier, efficient, and last long. Also, one major reason of assessing students' learning strategies is to raise students' awareness to the use of these strategies by teaching them to the students. In fact, teaching students learning strategies is known in the literature as “strategy training” and proved its efficiency. Research in the field of language learning strategies shows that “learners who received strategy training learn better than those who do not” (Oxford, 1990, p.201). Teachers, thus, are required to know the different strategies and how they can be used to facilitate the teaching and learning process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table one reports the frequency of students' use of the six strategies. The results presented in this table show that 63.52% of the students are found out to highly use the metacognitive strategies. This shows that students are *high users of metacognitive strategies*. The next highly used strategies are the compensation strategies where 54.11% are found out to use these strategies. 43.52% of the students are found out to highly use cognitive strategies while only 27.05% of the students have been found out to use affective strategies. The last highly used strategies among these students are memory strategies where only 21.17% are found out to use these strategies.

Table two shows the overall frequency of students' use of Language Learning Strategies. The results indicate that **52.94%** of the students are moderate users of learning strategies while **45.88%** are high strategies users. Only 1.17% are low strategies users.

Table three tells us about the overall mean for every strategy as well as the overall mean for the Language Learning Strategies of all participants.

First, Table three shows that the students use more frequently the metacognitive strategies compared to the other types. The mean 3.7 shows that these students are *high metecognitive strategies users*. The next frequent types of strategies used by these students are cognitive, compensation and social strategies. The mean score 3.4 for each type of strategies reveal that they are moderate users of these strategies. The third type of strategies used by these students is the affective strategies to be followed by the memory strategies which are the least frequent type of strategies used by these students represented by a mean score of 3.02.

Second, the calculated overall means of Language Learning Strategies is **3.3** as shown in the table. This reveals that these students are **moderate users of language learning strategies**.

On the basis of the inventory results, a list of findings can be summarized as follows:

First, the students of Teachers' Training College participating in the study are mainly moderate users of learning strategies (as shown in table 3); although a noticeable percentage of students are high users of these strategies as indicated in (table 1)

Second, a difference has been noticed in the students' use of the six strategies. The participants show high use of the metacognitive strategies while they moderately use memory and affective strategies .The order of the frequent type of language learning strategies used by these students is as follows: first, metacognitive strategies to be followed by cognitive, compensation and social strategies to be followed by affective strategies, then finally memory strategies.

The findings of this study have some pedagogical implications. It is suggested that assessing students' learning strategies use is prerequisite for effective teaching and learning. Teachers are required to know about the students' differences in using learning strategies and the prevailing type of strategies used among these students in order to adjust their teaching practices to these strategies as well as to foster strategies use among their students. Oxford, (1990, 200) reported that one of the soundest reasons to assess students' learning strategies is that teachers can provide training on how to improve these strategies.

Moreover, lack of awareness of learning strategies, in Harold's term "obviously limits an individual's ability in a situation requiring new learning strategies" (1978,p. 2). It is necessary that teachers give instructions about the use of the learning strategies which makes of assessing students' learning strategies a step towards a more effective teaching. Teachers are required to foster the strategies use in order to compensate the deficit in students' language learning. Thus, students

who are low users of language learning strategies can be trained to use these strategies to improve their performance in language learning.

In fact, teaching students the learning strategies is known in the literature by **strategies instruction**. Strategy instruction refers to ways by which “ teachers can help students become more effective learners” (Oxford, 2011, 175). In fact, many theorists offered different models to strategy instruction namely: Oxford (1990 updated 2006), O' Malley and Chamot (1990), Chamot (2004, 2005), Macaro (2001a, 2001b) Grenfell and Harris (1999). The Oxford's model for strategies instruction (oxford 2011, p.184) explains strategy instruction as a process by which teachers start their instruction by assessing current students' learning strategies use and by raising their initial students' awareness

In this study, the participants are found out to use less memory strategies compared to the other strategies while these strategies are essential in learning foreign languages. Oxford (1990, 30) reported that teachers can use memory strategies to extend students' vocabulary since memory strategies help language learners to cope with the difficulty of remembering the large amounts of vocabulary necessary to achieve fluency.

Therefore, teachers are required to train these students to use memory strategies for its importance in learning a foreign language in general and for the extension of vocabulary.

Also, raising awareness to the different strategies does not only help students in their learning but also in their future career as teachers. These students, who are so-called teachers, are required to use these strategies when teaching their students the different skills ; such as reading, writing, speaking, and writing, or language components; such as grammar, phonetics, vocabulary by relating the different strategies to the materials used in their teaching .

4. EXPERIMENTAL

4.1 Method

This study is a quantitative in nature. A survey design has been use to find out about students' attitudes about strategies use in their learning.

4.2 Participants

The participants of this study are Algerian students enrolled in third year Training College for Teachers, aged between 21 and 22 years. These students have been learning English for approximately nine years: Seven years in the middle and secondary school where English has been taught as a second foreign language, and two years as the major medium of instruction at the Teachers' Training College. 85 male and female students participated in this study to know about their attitudes to learning strategies' use.

4.3 Data Collection Instrument

In order to investigate students' actual use of strategies when learning English as a foreign language, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learners (SILL) version 7.0 that is the version for the speakers of other languages learning English was used to collect data . The SILL is a Strategy Inventory for Language Learning which was elaborated by Oxford (1989) to gather information about students learning English as a foreign or second language. The aim underlying the use of the SILL is to assess the strategies the students used in their learning of English. SILL comprises 50 items to be completed by the learners, and it covers the following strategies: Remembering more effectively, Using mental processes, Compensating for missing knowledge, Organizing and evaluating learning, Managing emotions, Learning with others.

4.4 Data Collection Procedure.

Data were collected following the same procedure suggested by the Survey designer.

The students received directions and items and the Worksheet for Scoring and Administering the SILL (see appendices). They were first asked to fill in the questionnaire for duration of 30 minutes at the presence of the teacher who gives guidance when needed. After that the students were allowed 20 minutes to fill in the worksheet and the profile.

4.5 Data Analysis

To categorize the frequency of the students' language learning strategy use, the study adopts the Oxford categorization stated below.

High strategy use: mean score is of 3.5 - 5.0

Medium strategy use: mean score is of 2.5 - 3.4

Low strategy use : mean score is of 1.0 - 2.4

Also, the mean has been calculated for each type of strategies as well as the overall mean of Language Learning Strategies.

5. CONCLUSION

“Learners need to learn how to learn and teachers need to learn how to facilitate learning” (Oxford, 1990, p.201). Learning strategies have proved effectiveness in the learning process as they make learning faster, easier, and lifelong. Teachers can facilitate learning by raising awareness to strategies use by assessing their students' use of learning strategies and by offering training to strategies use. The finding of this study may help teachers to adjust their teaching practices to their students' strategies use by providing pertinent materials and adequate media that meet their students' learning strategies. Also, it stresses the importance of fostering students' use of the language strategies' use, especially when the results of the assessment

show that students focus only on few strategies and ignore others. Teacher, thus, is required to offer training to students who do not use these strategies as far as the learning strategies are teachable.

6.Figures and tables:

The covered strategies/ the average	LOW 1 to 2.5		MEDIUM 2.5 to 3.4		High 3.5 to 5	
	Students / number	percentage	students / number	percentage	Students/ number	percentage
Part A : Memory strategies	12	14.11%	55	64.70%	18	21.17%
Part B:Cognitive strategies	4	4.70%	43	50.58%	37	43.52%
Part C: compensation strategies	5	5.88%	34	40%	46	54.11%
Part D: metacognitive strategies	3	3.52%	28	32.94%	54	63.52%
Part E:Affective strategies	12	14.11%	50	58.82%	23	27.05%
Part F:Social strategies	11	12.94%	30	35.29%	44	51.76%

Table (1) : frequency of students' use of the learning strategies for each part of the strategies

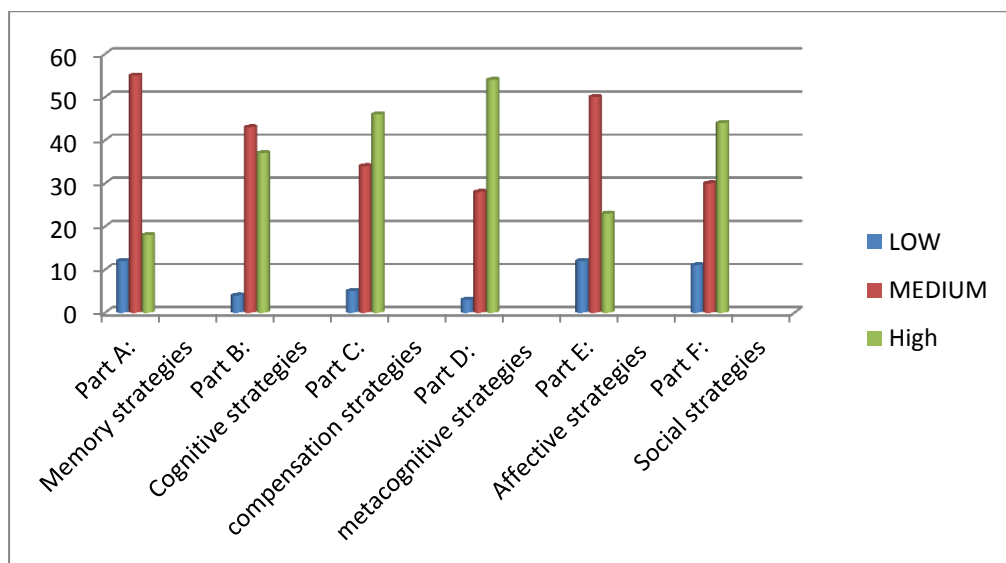


Figure (1): Frequency of each part students' use of the leaning strategies

	LOW		MEDIUM		HIGH	
Frequency of students' use of learning strategies	1	1.17%	45	52.94%	39	45.88%

Table 2: frequency of students' use of language learning strategies

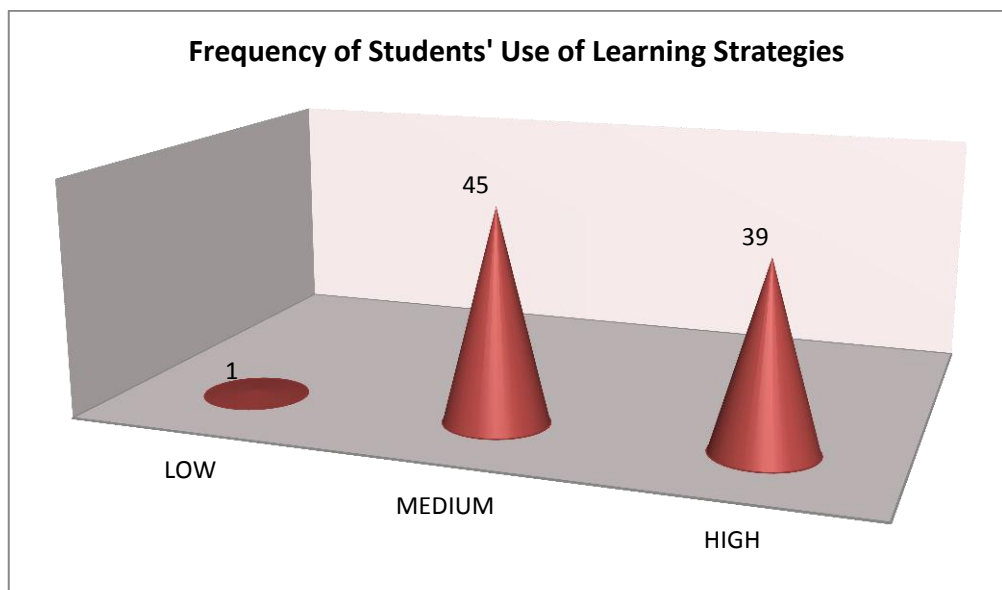


Figure 2: Frequency of students' use of language learning strategies

Language learning strategy	The mean	The rank	Level
Memory strategies	3.0	4	medium
Cognitive strategies	3.4	2	medium
Compensation strategies	3.4	2	medium
Metacognitive strategies	3.7	1	high
Affective strategies	3.1	3	medium
Social strategies	3.4	2	medium
The overall mean for LLS	3.3		medium

Table three: the overall mean for Language Learning Strategies

7- Appendices

Teachers Training College

Title: Students' Attitudes to Learning Strategies Use in Learning English as a Foreign Language. A case of Algerian Teachers' Training College (ENSB)

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

(Oxford R. 1989)

Directions

This form of the STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (SILL) is for students of English as a second or foreign language. You will find statements about learning English. Please read each statement. On the separate Worksheet, write the response (1, 2, 3,4,5) that tells HOW TRUE OF YOU THE STATEMENT IS;

1. never or almost never true of me
2. usually not true of me
3. somewhat true of me
4. usually true of me
5. always or almost always true of me

NEVER OR ALMOST TRUE OF ME means that the statement is **very rarely** true of me

USUALLY NOT TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true **less than half the time**

SOMEWHAT TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true of you about **half the time**

USUALLY TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true **more than half the time**

ALWAYS OR ALMOST ALWAYS TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true of you **almost always**

Answer in terms of **how well the statement describes you**. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. **There is no right or wrong answers** to these statements. Put your answers on the separate Worksheet. Please make no marks on the items. Work as quickly as you can without being careless. This usually takes about 20 to 30 minutes to complete. If you have any question, let the teacher know immediately.

EXAMPLE

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

Read the item, and choose a response (1 through 5 above), and write in the space after the item .

I actively seek out opportunities to talk with native speakers of English -----

You have just completed the example item. Answer the rest of the items on the Worksheet

Students' name:

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

R. Oxford, 1989

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

(write answers on Worksheet)

Part A

1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English
2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.
3. I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to me remember the word.
4. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation which the word might be used
5. I use rhymes to remember new English words.

6. I use flashcard to remember new words.

7. I physically act out new English words

8. I review English lessons often.

9. I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign

Part B

10. I say or write new English words several times.

11. I try to talk like native English speakers

12. I practice the sounds of English

13. I use the English words I know in different ways

14. I start conversation in English

15. I watch English language TV show spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English

16. I read for pleasure in English

17. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English

18. I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully

19. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English

20. I try to find patterns in English

21. I find the meaning of and English words by dividing it into pas that I understand

22. I try not to translate word-for-word

23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English

Part C

24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses

25. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures

26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English

27. I read English without looking up every new word

28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English

29. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing

Part D

30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English
31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English
34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English
35. I look for people I can talk to in English
36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English
37. I have clear goals for improving my English talk
38. I think about my progress in English.

Part E

39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English
40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake
41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English
42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English
43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary
44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English

Part F

45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again
46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk
47. I practice English with other students
48. I ask for help from English speakers
49. I ask questions in English
50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers

Worksheet for answering and scoring

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

1. The blanks (-----) are numbered for each item on the SILL.
2. Students write the response to each item (that is, write 1,2,3,4, or 5) in each blank
3. They add up each column then put the result on the line marked SUM
4. They divide by the number under SUM to get the average for each column, then round this average nearest tenth, as 3.4
5. They add up all the SUMS for the different parts of the SILL , then divide by 50
6. The teacher gives the profile of the results

<u>Part A</u>	<u>Part B</u>	<u>Part C</u>	<u>Part D</u>	<u>Part E</u>	<u>Part F</u>	<u>whole SILL</u>
1.-----	10.-----	24.-----	30.-----	39.-----	45.-----	SUM Part A----
2.-----	11.-----	25.-----	31.-----	40.-----	46.-----	SUM Part B----
3.-----	12.-----	26.-----	32.-----	41.-----	47.-----	SUM Part C----
4.-----	13.-----	27.-----	33.-----	42.-----	48.-----	SUM Part D----
5.-----	14.-----	28.-----	34.-----	43.-----	49.-----	SUM Part E----
6.-----	15.-----	29.-----	35.-----	44.-----	50.-----	SUM Part F----
7.-----	16.-----		36.-----			
8.-----	17.-----		37.-----			
9.-----	18.-----		38.-----			
	19.-----					
	20.-----					
	21.-----					
	22.-----					
	23.-----					

SUM----- SUM----- SUM-----SUM----- SUM----- SUM----- SUM -----

/ 9 = ----- / 14= ----- /6= ----- /9=-----/6 = -----/6= ----- /50= ----- (overall average)

The profile of the results on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

The students will receive this profile after they have completed the Worksheet. This sheet will show the SILL results. These results will tell the kinds of strategies the students use in learning English. there are no right or wrong answer.

To complete this profile , students transfer the averages of each profile of the SILL, and the students overall average for the whole SILL. These averages are found on the Worksheet.

<u>Part</u>	<u>what Strategies are covered</u>	<u>students' average on this part</u>
A.	Remembering more effectively	-----
B.	Using all your mental processes	-----
C.	Compensating for missing knowledge	-----
D.	Organizing and evaluating your learning	-----
E.	Managing your emotions	-----
F.	Learning with others	-----
STUDENTS' OVERALL AVERAGE		-----

Key to understanding average

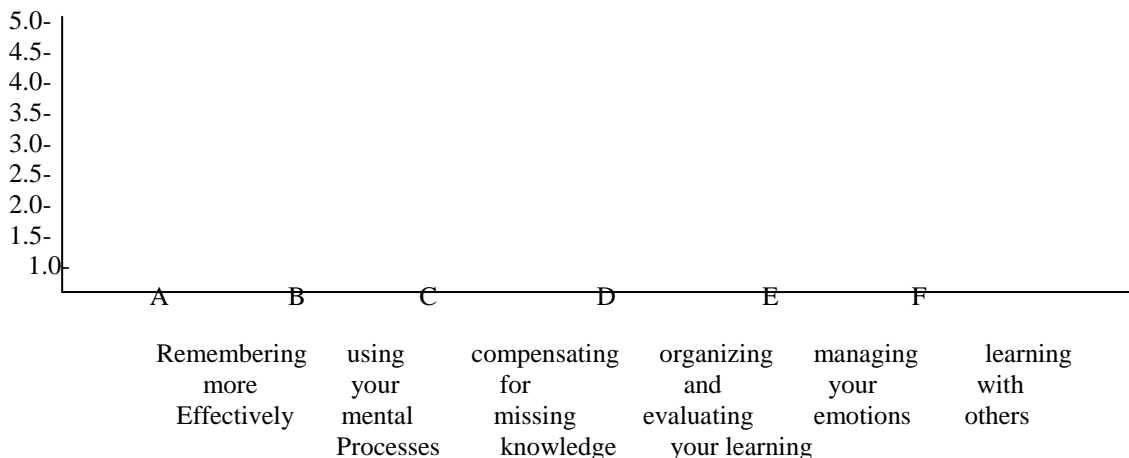
High	always or almost used	4.5 to 5.0
	Generally used	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	sometimes used	2.5 to 3.4
	generally not used	1.5 to 2.4
Low	Almost or never used	1.0 to 1.4

What these averages mean

The overall average indicates how frequently students use language learning strategies in general. The averages for each part of the SILL show which group of strategies the students tend to use the most in learning a new language.

Graphing the averages

The graph tells the participants which strategies they are high or very low.



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