

Good Language Learner and the Use of Affective Strategies: A Case Study of an Iranian Advanced EFL Learner

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Abstract: In the field of second language learning, the dichotomy of good language learners vs. poor language learners has always been a controversial issue drawing the attention of many researchers. One of the areas in which good language learners have been reported to have a good command relates to language learning strategies (LLS). For this purpose, the present research was developed to investigate specifically the use of affective strategies by a sample successful language learner. Accordingly, an Iranian advanced EFL learner was selected at Sharif English Language Institute in Asadabad, Hamedan. This study was qualitative in nature, since no statistical operations were mainly applied, rather the researcher tried to analyze and interpret the obtained data in a descriptive qualitative form. Three instruments including Oxford's (1990) SILL, an informal interview as well as observations were used in order to gather the necessary data for analysis. Relying on the frequency of strategy use, it was revealed that the participant had an acceptable command over the whole strategies in general and the affective strategies in specific. However, affective strategies had a lower use compared to metacognitive, social, and compensation strategies. The reasons for the choice of each affective strategy have been discussed in detail and certain implications have been pointed out both for language learners and language teachers.

Key words: language learning strategies, good language learner, affective strategies

1. Introduction

Second language learning has been a great concern for many people due to various reasons. Normally, being able to use and communicate in a second language has been considered as an advantage by most of the people. In this regard, many studies have been done and, as a result, many theories have been proposed all trying to make the process of SLA as easier as possible. However, given the complexity of language, different learning environments as well as the diversity of language learners regarding their different individual factors show that this process is not an easy task and requires great effort and attention. Taking a look at the history of language teaching and learning reveals that this direction has not followed a steady trend; rather it has undergone many changes. Up to the 17th century, language teaching and teacher-centered methodologies were dominant in the field. The teacher was seen as the key element in the process and less attention was paid to learners and language learning. However, later on, due to the emergence of interactionist theories and emphasis on learners' cognitive processes, a shift of focus occurred in educational programs and learning and learners received more attention and priority over the previous teacher-centered methodologies. As a result, many researchers began to concentrate on investigating the characteristics of the learner and the processes involved in the language learning. One of these characteristics which has enjoyed notable attention, is the learning strategies employed by good language learners in the process of acquiring a second or foreign language. The dichotomy of language learners into successful and unsuccessful is linked to

a great extent to the use of language learning strategies. Relationship between strategy use and language proficiency were initially examined through the "good language learner" investigations (Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin, 1975), which resulted in general profiles of successful language learners and identified specific patterns of strategy use as success markers. In the same line, the present study is an attempt to investigate the language learning strategy use of a successful language learner with an emphasis on the affective strategies in order to shed light on the processes good language learners follow in the direction of second language learning.

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Definitions and Characteristics of LLS

Regarding the popularity of research in the area of language learning strategies (LLS), a number of definitions have been proposed by different researchers some of the main ones are given in the following lines.

Perhaps the most popular definition is proposed by Green and Oxford (1995) who state that "LLS are specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students use, often intentionally, to improve their progress in developing L2 skills" (p. 265). Richards, Platt and Platt (1985) define LLS as a "way in which a learner attempts to work out the meaning and uses of words, grammatical rules, and other aspects of language" (p. 162). One of the great figures in this field is Oxford who gives this definition: "LLS are specifications taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more efficient, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 2001, p. 166). Similarly, Weinstein and Mayer (1986, as cited in Chastain, 1988) refer to LLS as "behaviors and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning and that are intended to influence the learners encoding process" (p. 164). Another popular definition is proposed by Chamot. For him, "learning strategies are techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning, recall of both linguistic and content area information" (Chamot, 1987, p. 63).

In order to clarify the point more tangibly, unlike the above scholars, some other researchers have distinguished between strategies and other term like skills and techniques. For instance, Stern (1983) makes a distinction between strategies and techniques, stating that "In our view, strategy is best reserved for general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by the language learner, leaving techniques as the term to refer to particular forms of observable learning behavior" (p. 252). Oxford is another key researcher in this field who compares "learning strategies" with "learning style". In his view, "learning style" is influenced by such factors as the person's cognitive, affective and behavioral characteristics and refers to a person's general approach to learning, while the term "learning strategies" are actions and behaviours used by all learners to assist them succeed but not all learners are aware of the strategies they use.

Since different terminologies such as "learner strategies" (Wenden & Rubin, 1987), "learning strategies" (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), and "language learning strategies" (Oxford, 1990) have been proposed by different scholars, most researchers have tried to characterize these strategies in terms of their general characteristics, which all seem to follow the same goal, that is, equipping learners with a set of tools which enhance their language performance and improve their autonomy as the ideal goal of language learning. Some of the main features of LLS are mentioned below.

Oxford (1990, p. 9), using the term LLS, believes that these strategies enable learners to become "more self-directed, expand the role of language teachers, are problem-oriented, are teachable, are flexible, are influenced by a variety of factors and involve many aspects, not just the cognitive".

On the whole, taking the above points and definitions into account, some basic characteristics are pointed out for LLS: First, LLS are learner generated; they are steps taken by language learners. Second, LLS enhance language learning and help develop language competence, as reflected in the learner's skills in listening, speaking, reading, or writing the L2 or FL. Third, LLS may be visible (behaviours, steps, techniques, etc.) or unseen (thoughts, mental processes). Fourth, LLS involve information and memory (vocabulary knowledge, grammar rules, etc.). (as cited in Lessard-Clouston, 1997)

Ellis (1994, as cited in Attar, 2010) characterizes the term 'strategies' in the following way:

1. Strategies refer to both general approaches and specific actions or techniques used to learn an L2.
2. Strategies are problem-oriented and the learner deploys a strategy to overcome some particular learning problem.
3. Learners are generally aware of the strategies they use and can identify what they consist of if they are asked to pay attention to what they are doing /thinking.
4. Strategies involve linguistic behavior (such as requesting the name of an object) and non-linguistic behavior (such as pointing at an object in order to tell its name).
5. Linguistic strategies can be performed in the L1 and L2.
6. Some strategies are behavioral while others are mental. Thus some strategies are directly observable, while others are not.
7. In the main, strategies contribute indirectly to learning by providing learners with data about the L2 which they can then process. However, some strategies may also contribute directly (for example, memorization strategies directed at specific lexical items or grammatical rules).
8. Strategy use varies considerably as a result of both the kind of task the learner is engaged in and individual learner preferences. (pp. 532-533)

2.2 Classifications of LLS

1970s was a remarkable period in the history of LLS research, since a lot of studies were conducted aimed at designing different inventories of the learning strategies. These inventories were compiled through observing learners using different strategies while learning the language. According to [Macaro \(2001\)](#), the classification of LLS has primarily followed the theory of cognition which refers to how the brain works for information processing and retrieval. Strategies are used to retrieve and store new information in the brain until this information becomes automatic and such strategies are classified into a system by researchers. From the 1980s on, researchers tried to identify broad classes of learning strategies, under which large numbers of more specific strategies could be grouped ([Sadeghi & Attar, 2013](#)). As far as the classification of the LLS is concerned, different realizations have been screened. Accordingly, researchers have classified them differently according to various criteria, as whether they are cognitive or metacognitive ([O'Malley et al., 1985](#)); whether they contribute directly or indirectly to learning ([Rubin, 1981](#)); and whether they are practiced in the classroom, in individual study, or during interaction with others ([Politzer, 1983, as cited in Aliakbari & Hayatzadeh, 2008](#))

In providing a classification framework [Rubin \(1981\)](#), subsumes LS under two primary groupings and a number of subgroups. His first primary category consists of strategies that directly affect learning and includes clarification/verification, monitoring, memorization, guessing, inductive and deductive reasoning, and practicing. The second primary category consists of strategies which indirectly contribute to learning and includes creating practice opportunities and using production tricks such as communication strategies.

[Mochizuki \(1999\)](#) believes that in the field of L2 acquisition, there are two types of strategies: learning strategies and communication strategies. The former deals with input, or taking messages from others, in ways such as processing, storage and retrieval, whereas the latter deals with output, or how we deliver messages to others.

[Oxford \(1990\)](#), also advocates direct and indirect strategies. To her, direct strategies “involve direct learning and use of the subject matter”, in this case a new language. They are further subdivided into memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies, “contribute indirectly but powerfully to learning”. They are also subdivided into metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Figure 1 summarizes Oxford's classification of LLS.

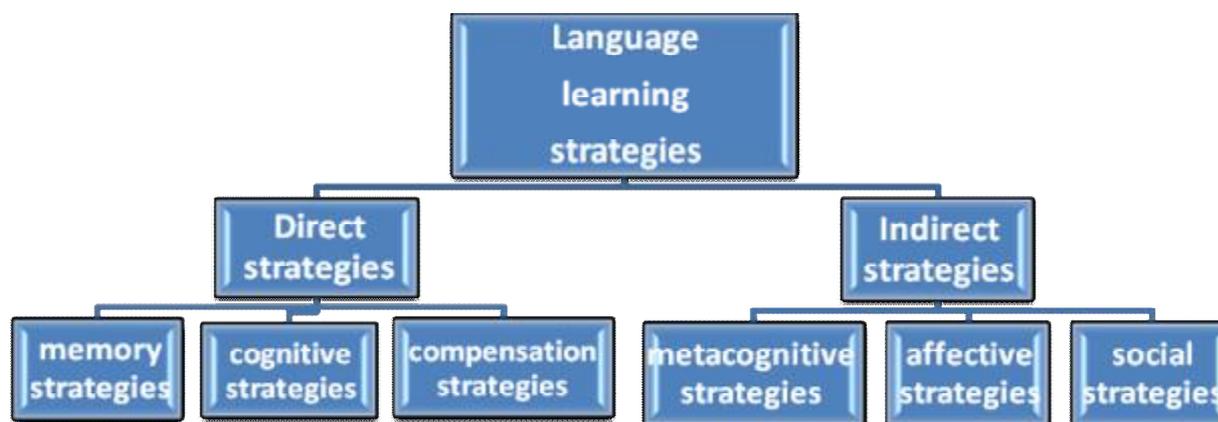


Figure 1. Oxford's (1990) classification of language learning strategy (LLS)

Perhaps Jones (1998) is right in accentuating that Oxford's LLS system (1990) is more comprehensive and detailed than earlier classification models. In addition, it is reliable and valid across many cultural groups, and it links individual strategies, as well as groups of strategies, with each of the four language skill areas of listening, reading, speaking and writing (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). According to this classification, memory strategies, such as creating mental linkages and employing actions, aid in entering new information into long-term memory and retrieving it when needed for communication. Cognitive strategies like analyzing and reasoning are used for forming and revising internal mental modes and for receiving and producing messages in the target language. Compensation strategies, such as guessing unknown words while listening and reading or using circumlocution in speaking and writing, are needed to overcome any gaps in knowledge of the language. As for the indirect strategies, metacognitive strategies, such as linking new information with pieces already known, seeking practice opportunities, and self-monitoring, are techniques used for organizing, planning, focusing, and evaluating one's own learning. Affective strategies enable learners to control feelings, motivations, and attitudes related to language learning. Social strategies, such as asking questions and cooperation with others, facilitate interaction with others, often in a discourse situation. In agreement with the Jones (1998) understanding, the present study adopted Oxford (1990) model and her Strategy Inventory as the basis of the investigation (as cited in Aliakbari & Hayatzadeh, 2008).

Oxford's taxonomy is different from other taxonomies in that Oxford classifies heterogeneous strategies into more specific categories (Ehrman et al., 2003). However, she also cautions that there is overlap between some of the strategies. Planning, for instance, can be both a metacognitive strategy, and because it also requires reasoning, a cognitive strategy.

2.3 Good Language Learners and Strategy Use

Naturally, in the process of SLA some learners are more successful than others in that they are more capable in terms of language skills and can acquire a second language more easily and with higher speed. According to Brown (2007), as the knowledge of second language acquisition increased during the 1970s, teachers and researchers concluded that no single method of language teaching and research findings would mark the start of universal success in teaching a second language (as cited in Zare, 2012). In fact, regardless of the teaching method and practices used, some learners proved to be more successful than others. This observation led many researchers to investigate characteristics of good language learners, because it is assumed that some of the superiority of successful learners can be attributed to learning strategies (Rubin, 1987). In this regard, Rubin (1975) suggested that good L2 learners are willing and accurate guessers; have a strong drive to communicate; are often uninhibited; are willing to make mistakes; focus on form by looking for patterns; take advantage of all practice opportunities; monitor their speech as well as that of others; and pay attention to meaning.

Like Rubin (1975), many other researchers including Stern (1975) and Rubin and Thompson (1994) have worked on categorizing the characteristics of successful/good language learners. Rubin and Thompson (1994) believe that good language learners:

1. Find their own way, taking responsibility for their own learning,
2. Organize information about language,
3. Are creative, and try to feel the language by experimenting its grammar and words,
4. Create opportunities for practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom,
5. Learn to live with uncertainty by not getting confused and by continuing to talk or listen without understanding every word,
6. Use memory strategies to bring back what has been learned,
7. Make errors work for them and not against them,
8. Use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of the first language, in learning a second language.
9. Use contextual cues to help them in comprehension,
10. Learn to make intelligent guesses,
11. Learn chunks of language as wholes and formalized routines to help them perform “beyond their competence”,
12. Learn to use certain tricks to keep conversations going,
13. Learn certain production strategies to fill in gaps in their own competence,
14. Learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language regarding the formality of the situation.

In these studies, as [Ellis \(1994\)](#) noted, two approaches have been followed. In the first approach, successful learners are identified and interviewed and/or asked to complete a written questionnaire. In the other, which is a comparative approach, more and less successful learners are compared.

[Reiss \(1985, as cited in Sadeghi & Abolfazli Khonbi, 2013\)](#), studying college learners at elementary and intermediate levels, found that 'monitoring' and 'attending to form' came out as the most common strategies used by learners whom teachers picked out as 'good'. Then he expressed his surprise over the finding that attending to meaning was of less importance than attending to form. [Huang and Van Naersson \(1985\)](#), however, found no difference between high-and low-proficiency groups on two strategies that reflected attention to form ('formal practice' and 'monitoring'). In another study, [Chamot et al. \(1998\)](#) worked on two groups classified as 'effective' and 'ineffective' by their teachers. They found that effective students used a greater range of strategies; particularly they were able to choose strategies that were appropriate for particular tasks. The effective learners were also more purposeful in their approach, engaged in 'comprehension monitoring' to a greater extent than 'production monitoring', and made extensive use of their general knowledge as well as L2 linguistic knowledge. [Stevick \(1989, as cited in Alemi & Daftarifard, 2011\)](#), in his study of successful learners, noted that they "differ markedly with regard to what ... they prefer to do and not to do" (p. 128). He, nevertheless, thinks that it is possible to identify an 'overall pattern'. There are, perhaps, five major aspects of successful language learning as evidenced by the various studies done: (1) a concern for language form, (2) a concern for communication (functional practice), (3) an active task approach, (4) an awareness of the learning process, and (5) a capacity to use strategies flexibly in accordance with task requirements (p. 546).

As it is seen, a lot of studies have been done to investigate the LLS used by different language learners. Also, such studies have investigated the effect of different factors including age, proficiency level, motivation, sex, age, nationality as well as other cognitive and individual factors on the use of LLS. Almost, all of these studies have been conducted quantitatively relying on computational procedures. However, taking a look at the literature discloses a paucity of research analyzing qualitatively the LLS used by an individual learner. In fact, case studies due to their better manageability provide researchers with an appropriate tool to analytically and qualitatively investigate a phenomenon. Therefore, in the same line with the above studies, the current paper is a case study which intends to follow two purposes. First, it wants to take a general look at the entire LLS used by an 18-year-old advanced EFL learner. Second and more specifically, this research is intended to analytically explore and explain the use of affective strategies by the same learner. The affective strategies were chosen since language learners' emotions are seen to be very crucial affecting the ease and the speed of SLA.

2.4 Statement of the Problem

As it is seen, a lot of studies have been done to investigate the LLS used by different language learners. Also, such studies have investigated the effect of different factors including age, proficiency level, motivation, sex, age, nationality as well as other cognitive and individual factors on the use of LLS. Almost, all of these studies have been conducted merely quantitatively relying on computational procedures. Also, such studies have just referred to general results obtained from a group of participants and they have ignored a critical analytical interpretation of the obtained results. However, taking a look at the literature discloses a paucity of research analyzing qualitatively the LLS used by an individual learner. Perhaps dealing with an individual learner provides an adequate time and more concentration for the researcher to analytically describe and interpret the obtained results. In fact, case studies due to their better control and manageability provide researchers with an appropriate tool to analytically and qualitatively investigate a phenomenon. Therefore, in the same line with the above studies, the current paper is a case study which intends to follow two purposes. First, it wants to take a general look at the entire LLS used by an 18-year-old advanced EFL learner. Second and more specifically, this research is intended to analytically explore and explain the use of affective strategies by the same learner. The affective strategies were chosen since language learners' emotions are seen to be very crucial affecting the ease and the speed of SLA.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Yusef Mehrabi is an 18-year-old boy studying English in Sharif Language Institute in Asadabad, Hamedan. He started studying English about two years ago and now he is considered as an advanced EFL learner at the beginning of semester 10. He has finished high school recently and now besides studying English he is preparing himself to enter the university. He is a very talented, clever, and creative student and actively participates in class discussions and exercises. Among his classmates he is the best and among the whole language learners in the institute he is known as a successful language learner. He is fluent in speaking, accurate in grammar and actually his writing is excellent. He always volunteers in doing the exercises and starting speaking activities in the classroom. Although most of the students have problem in listening, he is also very good in listening comprehension and always writes down the listening transcripts before coming to the class. He is not only good in English but also known as a top student in school lessons as all his friends agree on this point and consult him in their lesson problems. Finally, it should be mentioned that he is a bilingual Persian-Kurdish EFL learner. Although the language spoken at his home is Kurdish and he can speak Kurdish as well as Persian he prefers to speak Persian in public.

3.2 Instruments

Different techniques can be used in order to extract the use of learning strategies by the learners. In the current study, the researcher made use of three instruments in order to gather the necessary data for the purpose of analysis. The first instrument used in this study is the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which is a Likert-type measure (see appendix A). Many studies, papers, theses as well as dissertations have used this questionnaire in their investigations. It is a self-reporting questionnaire, devised by Oxford (1989, 1990) as a survey instrument for assessing the frequency of use of LLS by students. This instrument was designed to identify the strategies that make students more effective language learners. There are two versions for the instrument: an 80-item version for native speakers of English and a 50-item one for learners of English as a foreign or second language. Oxford (1990) mentioned that her taxonomy was built from a detailed blueprint of a range of over 200 possible strategy types. This questionnaire has been extensively checked for reliability and validity in multiple ways by different researchers. The SILL's reliability, as reported by Oxford and Ehrman (1995, as cited in Shabani & Najafi Sarem, 2009), is ordinarily in the range of 0.90s. The 50-item version has strong predictive and concurrent validity as related to language performance and sensory performance (Borzabadi, 2000, as cited in Shabani & Najafi Sarem, 2009). This self-report survey asks students to react to a series of strategy descriptions in terms of how often they use the strategies (always or almost always, generally, sometimes, generally not, never or almost never). The six categories of the SILL, number of items within each category, and one sample item for each scale are given in Table 1.

Table 1:

The Strategies, Number of Items Within Each Category, and One Sample Item for Each Scale (Taken from Shabani & Najafi Sarem, 2009)

| Strategies | Items | Sample item |
|-----------------|-------|---|
| A Memory | 9 | I physically act out new English words. |
| B Cognitive | 14 | I start conversations in English. |
| C Compensation | 6 | To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses. |
| D Metacognitive | 9 | I think about my progress in learning English. |
| E Affective | 6 | I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English. |
| F Social | 6 | I practice English with other students. |

The Persian translation of SILL by Borzabadi (2000) was used in this study (see appendix B). The researcher used this translated version of SILL for two reasons. First, answering a 50-item questionnaire in English may be time-consuming and embarrassing for respondents whose mother tongue is a language other than English, and a translated version can put them at ease. Second, a good translation can eliminate many of the possible ambiguities.

The second instrument used in this study was an informal oral interview organized around 30 minutes which was held in one session in the institute. Oral interviews are seen as a good device for collecting data, since they provide the researcher with personalized information on many types of strategies that could not be obtained through other instruments. The questions in this part were of two types. First, some general questions including the participant's personal information, reason for studying English, motivation, attitude, style, and so on were asked by the researcher. Second, a series of questions and statements which were directly related to the affective strategies on the questionnaire were asked. In this part, the participant was asked to provide an explanation for each affective statement on the questionnaire either he agreed or disagreed with each one. In other words he was asked to justify adequately for the choice or rejection of each strategy.

Observation was the third instrument utilized in this study. Observations can provide the researcher with useful information concerning the participant's developmental process of language learning, since the researcher can keep track of everything concerning the participant in the classroom. Concerning the participant in this research, prior to the beginning of the investigation, there was almost a comprehensive knowledge, since he has been the researcher's student for about 5 semesters in a row. However, with the beginning of the current study, the researcher, relying on the previous knowledge, tried to keep track of everything concerning the participant in classroom during the previous semester. The researcher observed the learning behavior of the participant in a careful manner and took some note at the end of every session. The classes were held two times a week on odd days.

3.3 Procedure

As mentioned earlier, the data for the present study was collected from an 18-year-old advanced EFL learner in Sharif English Language Institute in Asadabad, Hamedan. The male participant in this investigation was learning English through interchange books in semester 10. He filled out Oxford's (1989, 1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning along with a background questionnaire concerning his sex, linguistic background, age, major, the language usually used at home, and the language usually used with friends. This background questionnaire helped the researcher to have a better picture of participant. Also, the participant was asked to take part in an oral interview which was held in 30 minutes during one session in the institute. The whole interview was recorded on the tape and transcribed for the purpose of subsequent analysis. In order for the participant to attend with preparation and to answer the questions appropriately, he was provided with enough information on the questionnaire as well as the aim of the study. He was given enough time in the interview to think about his learning practices as well as the strategies he used in language learning. Also, the interview was recorded several times till the best one was obtained.

As mentioned above, the third instrument used in this study was based on the observations which were conducted

during 17 instructive sessions within one semester in the institute. The researcher observed every learning behavior of the participant carefully and took the necessary notes concerning the developmental process of the participant at the end of each class session. It should be mentioned that since the participant in this study has been the researcher's student for a long time, there was a close relationship and, as a result, the participant took part in the whole study both eagerly and responsibly.

4. Results and Discussion

The SILL used in this study, as was mentioned above, consists of 50 items in 6 categories including memory (9 items), cognitive (14 items), compensation (6 items), metacognitive (9 items), affective (6 items) and social (6 items). After filling out the questionnaire on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 and obtaining the required data, the mean of each of these strategies was calculated using SPSS version 16. Table 2 below shows the obtained results.

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Memory | 9 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.0000 | 1.22474 |
| Cognitive | 14 | 2.00 | 4.00 | 3.0000 | .78446 |
| Compensation | 6 | 2.00 | 4.00 | 3.3333 | .81650 |
| Metacognitive | 9 | 3.00 | 5.00 | 4.2222 | .66667 |
| Affective | 6 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.1667 | 1.47196 |
| Social | 6 | 3.00 | 4.00 | 3.5000 | .54772 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 6 | | | | |

As it is seen in table, the highest strategy use is for the metacognitive strategies which is 4.22. After that the social and the compensation strategies have the highest use which are 3.50 and 3.33 respectively. Affective strategies which are the focus of the present study have the third place which is shown to be 3.16. Finally, memory and cognitive strategies are equally the least used strategies by the learner; the mean for the both strategies is 3. Since the focus of this study has been exploring the use of affective strategies, the researcher, presenting just a quantitative report on the use of other strategies, focuses on describing and interpreting the use of affective strategies by the learner. Thus, the frequency and the choice of these strategies by the learner on the questionnaire are shown in table 3 below.

Table 3.

Frequency and Choice of Affective Strategies

| Sample Affective Items | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 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. | | × | | | |

1= Never

2 = Almost Never

3 = Sometimes

4 = Usually

5 = Always

As it is seen, the table clearly shows the choice of affective strategies by the learner. From among the items on the questionnaire, items 39-44 are affective strategies categorized as indirect strategies by Oxford (1990). Apparently, the learner in this study has had almost a good command over affective strategies, since generally he has taken advantage of five of them and just one of them (item 43) has never been used by him. Also as it is seen, four of the affective items (39-42) have been used over a good range of *sometimes* to *always*. Item 40 is used sometimes, items 39 and 42 are used usually, and item 41 is shown to be used always by the learner in his learning practices.

Affective strategies in Oxford's (1990) classification, as was mentioned before, have been categorized as indirect strategies. Contrary to direct strategies which contribute directly to language learning, indirect strategies according to Oxford (1990) "contribute indirectly but powerfully to learning". This statement confirms that learners' affections have a significant role in second language learning and can affect learning outcomes in a positive or negative way due to different reasons. Affective strategies, in general, enable learners to control feelings, motivations, and attitudes related to language learning and include strategies like identifying one's mood and anxiety level, talking about feelings, rewarding oneself for good performance, and using deep breathing or positive self-talk. These strategies have been shown in different studies to be related with and have an important effect on second language proficiency. In studies conducted by Dreyer and Oxford (1996, cited in Oxford 2003) among South African EFL learners and by Oxford and Ehrman (1995, cited in Oxford 2003) among native English speakers learning foreign languages, it was concluded that affective strategies are significantly related to L2 proficiency. On the other hand, some other studies showed that this relationship might be negative. For instance, in the research conducted by Mullins (1992, cited in Oxford, 2003) with EFL learners in Thailand, affective strategies showed a negative link with some measures of L2 proficiency. However learners were reported to have used a good proportion of other strategies in comparison to the affective strategies. Perhaps this result shows that affective strategies are popular and used more in the beginning stages of learning. With learners' more progress towards proficiency, the need for affective strategies is felt less than before.

In the present study, as it was shown, affective strategies had the fourth rank regarding their use by the learner. This might be in the same line with that of Mullin's study in that the observations conducted here prove the same result. In the beginning stages, the learner in this study was observed to make greater use of affective strategies while doing learning activities and different exercises in the classroom. For example, in the beginning stages, the participant reported to talk to his friends expressing his feeling concerning English language learning while this strategy decreased later. It seems that because the learner had achieved more proficiency, he was unwilling to express his internal emotions to his friends. Referring to this strategy (item 44) on the questionnaire reveals this point, since the learner has chosen the second response, i.e., rarely.

As was mentioned before, in order to obtain strong results, the research did not suffice to the mere SILL and took advantage of other instruments like observation and oral interview. Therefore, the participant was asked to provide enough justifications for his choices of affective strategies on the questionnaire through an informal interview. Before focusing on the main affective strategies on the questionnaire, the researcher was asked some general questions concerning his aim and motivation for learning English, his general perception and attitude towards English, his personality type as well as the type of learning he liked. Due to the limited number of affective statements on the questionnaire, these questions help the researcher to have a better picture of the participant and his affective characteristics.

With regard to his aim and motivation for learning English, the participant said that he is going to enter the university and he feels that English would be of great help to him in his later studies. Both internal and external motivation were observable here as the learner was very interested in learning English and being able to talk in English. Also he needed it because he was determined to go on his studies and to have some trips to overseas. His general perception of English was positive in that he liked the culture, the customs, and the freedom as well as other good feature of American society. He had a positive attitude towards learning English in that he was very interested to Americans' culture and way of life. He said that American people are happy and relaxed people and he like this a lot. Concerning the personality type he was neither a

pure introverted nor a pure extroverted person. He was a kind of balanced person sometimes willing to have relations and cooperate with others and sometimes willing to work and study alone.

The answers provided by the participant to the above questions were in fact in correspondence with the researcher's observations. The participant, as one of the best students in the classroom, was very motivated and participated in all learning activities. He was the only student who always did his homework completely and accurately. He was always volunteer to do the exercises and take part in classroom discussions. Whenever there was a cultural point in either conversations or reading passages, he showed a high motivation and interest in learning more information about them. Sometimes learners were asked to have a writing homework on the cultural points comparing them with our native culture. As usual, he was very good at writing and prepared comprehensive information on the cultural points available in the book. He talked about the customs, traditions and the culture of American people eagerly and sometimes talked about his plans in future to continue his studies in the United States.

Finishing these primary general questions, the researcher started the second part of the interview concentrating on the affective strategies on the questionnaire. For item 39, as it is seen in table 3 above, the participant reported that whenever he was afraid of using English, he usually tried to relax. The participant said that this strategy is helpful in that relaxation gives him focus as well as chance to think about his weaknesses and try to use English when he is psychologically in a good condition. This strategy is good since negative affections can hinder language learning. According to [Brown \(1994\)](#) one of the affective factors which can affect language learning is anxiety. High levels of anxiety have a destructive effect on the learner and may lead to frustration in the learner in long turn.

For item 40, the participant stated that when he is afraid of making a mistake, he sometimes encourages himself not to stop and continue speaking. In fact, second language learning necessitates making mistakes and mistakes have to be seen a natural and integral part of the process. [Brown \(1994\)](#) refers to risk-taking as the capacity to be able to make mistakes without being too restricted by concerns about how others perceive these mistakes. Therefore, language learners have not to be afraid of making mistakes and should raise risk-taking in themselves. Fear of mistakes can lead to the prevention of efficient language learning. However, it should be noted that high risk taking behavior is not necessarily good for language learning. [Brown \(1994\)](#) found that because they make calculated, thoughtful guesses, moderate risk-takers are the best language learners. Low risk-takers' answers are likely to be correct, but their progress will be slow, and high risk-takers may be somewhat thoughtless and wild in their communication attempts. With this regard, the participant here seemed to do well as he was observed to react properly and choose the moderate strategy.

Concerning item 41, that is, "I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English", the participant chose the alternative *always*. He described that since he works hard to be good at English, whenever he advances in learning he feels very happy and gives himself a reward which is listening to his favorite music. This can be regarded as a good strategy which can be attempted both by teachers and by the learners themselves. Taking a look at the available literature confirms this point as many researchers have referred to the positive effects of encouragements on the language learning. Even this strategy has been one of the basic principles of audiolingual teaching method in which it was known as "positive reinforcement" and was practiced a lot by the fans of this teaching methodology.

In response to item 42, as it is seen in table 3 above, the participant selected the fourth response (usually). He stated that one of the negative factors affecting his proficiency in English is the occasional negative feelings of fear and anxiety that prevent him from communication in English. He said that in these circumstances, he usually tries to overcome that feeling so that he can do his best. Taking a look at the history of language teaching, the Suggestopedia teaching methodology is known as the pioneer with regard to this point. One of the basic principles of this method was to provide a relaxed enjoyable environment in which there is no place for stress, anxiety and any negative feeling concerning language learning. Lozanov, the originator of this method, asserts that the reason for our inefficiency is that we set up psychological barriers to learning. In fact the Suggestopedia had been developed to help students eliminate the feeling that they cannot be successful and thus to help them overcome the barriers to learning.

In reaction to the statement “I write down my feelings in a language learning diary,” the participant replied that he has never utilized such strategy in his learning practices. He stated that I try to pay attention to my feelings while I am studying English simultaneously. This can be thought of as a useful affective strategy, since note-taking has been always considered as a positive technique which encourages awareness and noticing in language learning. According to [Schmidt \(1995\)](#), awareness (through attention) is necessary for noticing which in turn is essential for learning. According to [Schmidt \(1995\)](#), acquisition must entail awareness and that “learning requires awareness at the time of learning” (p. 26). [Schmidt \(1995\)](#) also states that “whatever is noticed in the input will become intake for learning” (p. 20). Taking these points into account reveals the importance of being aware of one’s psychological state during learning.

Finally, for the last affective item on the questionnaire the participant reported that he rarely talks to anyone else about how he feels when he is learning English. This item, along with the previous one, is the strategy which the participant did not take advantage of them in the learning process. For sure, this led to the low mean of affective strategy use in comparison to the other affective strategies. Peer interaction is seen as very important in the development of cognitive and affective factors. Learners feel more comfortable to talk about their feelings and emotions with their classmates compared with their teachers and this, in turn, has a positive effect on the whole process of language learning. [Vygotsky \(1978, cited in Brown, 1994\)](#) maintained that social interaction was fundamental in cognitive development.

5. Conclusion

The present paper was a case study intended to investigate qualitatively the language learning strategy use of an Iranian advanced EFL learner focusing specifically on the use of affective strategies. In fact, the main purpose of this article was to explore the affective strategy use of a successful language learner in order to shed light on the strategies that good language learners draw on in the process of language learning. Analyzing the results which were obtained through three instruments of observation, questionnaire and oral interview, it was revealed that the participant in this case study had an acceptable command over the use of affective strategies. However, it was not that much noticeable and was lower than the two other indirect strategies, i.e., social and metacognitive strategies. Compared with direct strategies, its frequency use was higher than memory and cognitive strategies but lower than compensation strategies. In fact, in comparison to the whole direct and indirect strategies, the affective strategies got the fourth position and this shows that the participant has not taken advantage of affective strategies to a great extent. However, in the same line with the purpose of this study, the researcher concentrates merely on the findings obtained from analyzing the affective strategy use by the learner.

The first and the most important general finding in this study is the significant role that affection plays in second language learning. Learners’ emotional states and their feelings were shown to have a significant effect on the ease and speed of second language learning. Generally, it was concluded that having positive emotions and feelings, being away from high anxiety, having the power of risk-taking, and expressing freely one’s feelings through social interaction with peers are among the factors that lead to efficient language learning. The important role of affection is highlighted in the literature by different researchers. Taking a look at different classifications of language learning strategies proves this point, since they all consider affective strategies as an integral part of their classification. Except [Oxford \(1990\)](#), [O’Malley et al. \(1985\)](#) and [Cohen \(1998\)](#) have designated an important place in their classifications to the affective strategies. Affective strategies are concerned with the control of affect and contribute to the regulation of emotions, motivation, and attitudes.

The findings of the present study can have important implications for language learners and for language teachers as well. Language learners should try to practice such strategies and include them in their usual language learning practices in order to reach higher proficiency. Furthermore, teachers should attempt to prepare the best learning conditions free of stress and anxiety that result in their students’ efficient learning. Also by identifying the strategies used by good language learners, the teachers can plan to teach these strategies to the poor language learners.

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