

Determining Language Learning Strategies Used by The Students at Faculty of Educational Sciences Based on Some Variables*

Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi Öğrencileri Tarafından Kullanılan Dil Öğrenme Stratejilerinin Bazı Değişkenlere Göre Belirlenmesi

Deniz Tuğçe ÖZMEN** Hamide Deniz GÜLLEROĞLU***

Ankara Üniversitesi

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to find out students' language learning strategies (LLS) based on their gender, high school type and academic achievement in their English courses, at Faculty of Educational Sciences at Ankara University. The research was carried out with 210 freshmen attending English classes. "Dil Öğrenme Stratejileri Envanteri" which is the adapted form of "Strategy Inventory for Language Learning" developed by Oxford (1990) was used to identify whether the students use direct or indirect strategies for learning a language. The direct strategies require mental processing of the target language including memory-related strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies. The indirect strategies support and manage their language learning consisting of meta-cognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. The results of the study indicate that the students at Faculty of Educational Sciences use all LLS at medium level and considering the levels of LLS use, the most frequent LLS are memory-related at high level. The female students use LLS more frequently than male students and there are statistically significant differences between the students graduated from various high school types. The findings also indicate that more successful learners use LLS at high level.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, Academic Achievement, Gender, High School Type

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı, Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi öğrencileri tarafından kullanılan dil öğrenme stratejilerinin cinsiyet, lise türü ve İngilizce dersi akademik başarıları değişkenlerine göre incelenmesidir. Araştırma, İngilizce dersine devam eden 210 birinci sınıf öğrencisi ile yürütülmüştür. Oxford (1990) tarafından geliştirilen "Strategy Inventory for Language Learning" adlı ölçme aracının uyarlanmış formu olan "Dil Öğrenme Stratejileri Envanteri", öğrencilerin dil öğrenirken kullandıkları doğrudan ve dolaylı stratejileri belirlemek üzere uygulanmıştır. Doğrudan stratejiler, bellek stratejileri, bilişsel stratejiler ve telafi stratejilerini içeren hedef dile yönelik zihinsel süreçleri gerektirir. Dolaylı stratejiler ise bilişüstü stratejiler, duyuşsal stratejiler ve sosyal stratejiler olarak dil öğrenmeyi destekler ve yönetir. Bu araştırmanın sonuçları, Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi öğrencilerinin dil öğrenme stratejilerini orta düzeyde; stratejilerin düzeyleri göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, bellek stratejilerini en yüksek düzeyde ve sıklıkla kullandıklarını göstermektedir. Kız öğrenciler, dil öğrenme stratejilerini erkeklerden daha sık kullanmaktadırlar. Ayrıca farklı lise türlerinden mezun olan öğrenciler arasında dil öğrenme stratejileri kullanımı açısından istatistiksel olarak farklılık bulunmaktadır. Araştırmanın sonuçları, daha başarılı öğrencilerin dil öğrenme stratejilerini yüksek düzeyde kullandıklarını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Dil Öğrenme Stratejileri, Akademik Başarı, Cinsiyet, Lise Türü.

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** Res Assist. Dr. Tuğçe ÖZMEN, Ankara University Faculty of Educational Science, Department and Evaluation, ozmen@education.ankara.edu.tr

*** Assist. Prof. Dr. Hamide Deniz GÜLLEROĞLU, Ankara University Faculty of Educational Science, Department of measurement and Evaluation, denizgulleroglu@yahoo.com

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Introduction

Learning a foreign language has become an important issue in the globalised world. Advances in technology and other fields in the world have led people to learn a foreign language. That's why, in recent years, factors effecting students' foreign language learning and achievement have been a crucial area for language educators. A growing interest in successful and unsuccessful learner characteristics has been developed. This interest has led researchers to carry out many studies depicting language learner differences effecting the achievement such as learning styles, personality, anxiety, motivation and attitudes. One of these characteristics is language learning strategies which has a significant role in learning settings.

Language learning strategies are specific actions, steps, behaviours or techniques used by students to enhance their own learning. These actions can be seeking out conversation partners, giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Similarly, according to Cohen (1996), second language learning strategies are the steps or actions selected by learners in order to improve the learning a second language. They are tools for active, self-directed involvement that is necessary for developing communicative ability (Oxford, 1996). Learning strategy is generally a factor that helps determine how and how well a student learns a second language. The word "strategy" is a Greek word and refers to a plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal. In the context of language learning, according to Oxford (1994), language learners use the strategies consciously to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing and using the target language. The strategies are not a single event, but they are creative sequence of actions which a language learner actively use. In other words, they have an explicit aim in assisting learners in improving the target language (Cohen, 1996).

Oxford (1990) presents a comprehensive classification for LLS. The strategies are divided into direct and indirect strategies; which can be divided into six subgroups. Direct strategies are classified as memory-related strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies are also classified as metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies.

Oxford (2003) summarizes six categories of learning strategies as follows: *Cognitive strategies* enable learners to manipulate the language material in direct ways, for instance, reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarising, synthesizing, outlining, reorganizing information to develop strong schemas (knowledge structures) practising in naturalistic settings and practicing structures and sound formally. *Metacognitive strategies* are employed for managing the learning process overall such as identifying one's own learning style preferences and needs, planning for a second language (L2) task, gathering and organizing materials, arranging a study space and a schedule, monitoring mistakes and evaluating task success. *Memory-related strategies* help learners link one L2 item or concept with another without deep understanding. That kind of strategies help learners to learn and get information in an orderly string while other techniques create learning and retrieval via sounds, images, a combination of sounds and images, body movement, mechanical means or location. *Compensation strategies* help the learner make up for missing knowledge. *Affective strategies* help learners control their feelings and attitudes related to language learning such as using music or laughter as part of learning process, identifying one's mood and anxiety level, talking about feelings, rewarding oneself for good performance and using deep breathing or positive self-talk. *Social strategies* help learners work with others and understand the target culture as well as the language such as seeking for correction, asking for clarification, working with peers, developing cultural understanding.

Several research have mainly been carried out related with which LLS frequently used by successful students in language skills and areas. The study by Ghee, Ismail and Kabilan (2010) showed that successful students use LLS more than less successful students. Similarly, a study by Green and Oxford (1995) investigated the learning strategies used by Puerto Ricon university students and they found that the successful learners use learning strategies more frequently than less successful learners. Many other studies indicated similar findings (Oxford, 1993; Shabou, Asassfeh & Alsbouh, 2010; Magogve & Oliver, 2007; Rahimi, Riazi & Saif, 2008).

Most of the studies also focused on the different preferences of language learning strategies used by different gender. The studies mainly found that female students used more learning strategies than male students (Sheorey, 1999; Al Shabou, Asassfeh and Alsbouh, 2010, Ghee, Ismail and Kabilan, 2010). Oxford and Nyikos (1989) carried out a research on 1200 students studying various languages in a Mid-Western American University. Their research showed that gender differences had a profound influence on LLS. Females were more frequent users of strategies.

In addition to gender differences and achievement, strategies mostly used by students were also investigated. Results usually showed that the strategies were used at medium level, but the strategies varied depending on the context of the research. The study by Akıllılar and Uslu (2011) stated that cognitive and metacognitive strategies were used at medium level. Moreover, Jing (2010) studied on first year undergraduates of non-English majors in a university in China. Compensation strategies were the most frequently used, memory-related strategies were the least reported. The research by Al-Shabou, Asassfeh and Alsboul (2010) similarly reported that the least used strategy was memory-related, but distinctively the most used strategy was metacognitive. Wong and Nunan (2010) searched which LLS were used more by effective students. The results showed that more effective language learners used communicative oriented strategies.

In this study, the high school type was seen as an important another variable for LLS regarding the circumstances in Turkey. The research by Akıllılar and Uslu (2011) indicated that the students graduated from Anatolian High School and Foreign Language Orientated High School used social and affective strategies.

The researchers have usually been focused on which LLS are used by successful and unsuccessful learners and encourage the unsuccessful ones to use those strategies. Oxford (1993) revealed that more proficient learners tend to use the LLS and the LLS usage is associated with other variables. From this point, this research aims to find out the students' LLS based on their gender, high school type and academic achievement.

Objectives of the Study

The study mainly aims at examining the LLS and presenting the differences in LLS they use based on academic achievement, gender and high school type. Depending on the main purpose, the research questions are listed below:

- 1) What are the LLS used by the students at Faculty of Educational Sciences at Ankara University?
- 2) Is there any significant difference between female and male students in terms of using LLS?
- 3) Are there any significant differences among the high school types from which the students graduated from in terms of using LLS?
- 4) Are there any significant differences among the levels of LLS the students use in terms of their English course grades?

Method

Model

This is a descriptive study which aims to determine the LLS used by the students at the Faculty of Educational Sciences based on different variables, such as gender, academic achievement and high school type.

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Participants

The participants of the study were the first grade students attending the English course at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at Ankara University. There were total of 531 first grade students attending the English course at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, however 210 students who were willing to participate took part in the study.

The departments of participants were Elementary Education (N=101, 48.09%), Special Education (N=29, 13.9%), Computer Education and Instructional Technologies (N=40, 19.05%), Guidance and Counselling (N=40, 19.05%). Among 210 participants, 149 of them were female students (71%), 61 male students (29%). 29 of them (13.8%) graduated from general high schools, 72 of them (34.3%) graduated from anatolian-science high school, 58 of them (27.6%) graduated from teacher's training high school and 51 of them (24.3%) graduated from vocational and technical high schools. Due to the fact that this study was carried out with the students at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, teacher's training high school was taken as a single variable.

Instruments

A set of questionnaire was used as the instrument to gather information from the students. The instrument consists of two parts. The first part includes personal questions about students such as gender, department, high school and location. The second part of the questionnaire is the adapted form of Oxford's "Strategy Inventory for Language Learning" (SILL). The inventory consists of six dimensions and 50 items. The students were asked to choose an alternative (does not reflect me, reflects me very slightly, reflects me to a certain context, reflects me to a great extent, reflects me fully) in a five-point Likert type scale. The SILL was adapted into Turkish Language and Culture by Cesur in 2008. Internal consistency of the inventory was found as 0.92. For validity, exploratory factor analysis was applied and six dimensions were found through the analysis. In addition, as a part of the study, participants' midterm exam results were included as an indicator of their academic achievement in English.

In this research, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated for the internal consistency. For the whole inventory, it was found as 0.96 and the coefficients for the subdimensions have been presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients For The Subdimensions

Strategies	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
Memory-related	0.83
Cognitive	0.89
Compensation	0.74
Metacognitive	0.88
Affective	0.67
Social	0.73

As it can be seen in Table 1, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients are between 0.67 and 0.89. It can be concluded that the internal consistency of the whole inventory and subdimensions are relatively high.

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted (using LISREL 8.20) in order to validate "Strategy Inventory for Language Learning" for the research group. Kaiser Meyer Olkin Measure of Sample Adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity showed that the data was reasonably suitable for the confirmatory factor analysis (KMO = 0.92; $p < .00$). Maximum likelihood (ML) was used as an estimation method. As a result of the analysis, the goodness of fit indices revealed that the six-factor-model adequately fit the data (Chi Square = 2126.72; $df=1019$; RMSEA = 0.081; SRMR = 0.076; CFI = 0.95).

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by SPSS 13.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify the participants' demographic information and strategies they used. Independent sample t-test was used to compare the strategies used by genders. One way ANOVA was used to compare the means of strategies in terms of high school type.

The use of LLS is determined by calculating the means of each strategy. The levels of each strategy use were labeled from one to three (low, medium, high). The low use of strategy is determined as 2.49 and below. The medium use of strategy is determined between 2.50 and 3.49 and the high use of strategy use is determined as 3.50 and higher (Oxford, 1990). The levels of each strategy use were compared in terms of their midterm exam results through One Way ANOVA.

Findings

The results of the study have been presented below in the order of research questions:

LLS Used by the Students

The means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values of each language learning strategy have been given in Table 2. Considering low, medium and high strategy use levels, the means of each strategy indicate that the students at the Faculty of Educational Sciences use all strategies at medium level.

Table 2.

The Average Means of LLS Used by Students (N=210)

Strategies	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Memory-related	1.0	5.0	3.25*	0.73
Cognitive	1.0	3.6	2.85*	0.78
Compensation	1.0	3.2	3.13*	0.78
Metacognitive	1.0	4.0	3.03*	0.82
Affective	1.0	3.0	2.76*	0.74
Social	1.0	2.5	2.97*	0.77

*Medium level is between 2.50 and 3.49

In Table 3, descriptive statistics of LLS at low, medium and high levels have been presented in detail. Considering the levels of each strategy, all LLS were most frequently used at medium level ($N_{\text{memory-related}}=96$; $N_{\text{cognitive}}=107$; $N_{\text{compensation}}=94$; $N_{\text{metacognitive}}=100$; $N_{\text{affective}}=104$; $N_{\text{social}}=108$) as mentioned above. At high level, memory-related strategies were used most ($N_{\text{memory-related high}}=83$).

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics of LLS at Low, Medium and High Levels (N= 210)

	Memory			Cognitive			Compensation			Metacognitive			Affective			Social		
	N	M	SS	N	M	SS	N	M	SS	N	M	SS	N	M	SS	N	M	SS
Low	31	2.0	0.4	59	1.9	0.50	35	1.8	0.40	52	1.90	0.40	69	2.0	0.40	42	1.8	0.50
Med.	96	3.1	0.8	107	2.9	0.26	94	3.0	0.26	100	3.05	0.27	104	2.9	0.24	108	2.7	0.27
High	83	3.9	0.3	44	3.9	0.26	81	3.8	0.37	58	3.98	0.35	37	3.8	0.30	60	3.8	0.31

The Differences of LLS Between Genders

The independent sample t-test results on the strategies used by genders have been shown in Table 4. As it can be seen from the table, female students use strategies more frequently than

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male students in all categories. The t-test results show that female students use strategies more frequently than male students in all categories. Memory-related strategies ($t= 4.07, p= 0.00$), compensation strategies ($t= 2.86 p= 0.00$), metacognitive strategies ($t= 1.99, p= 0.04$) and affective strategies ($t= 2.16, p=0.03$) show statistically significant differences between genders.

Table 4.

The LLS used between genders

Strategies	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Female	3.39	2.94	3.24	3.10	2.83	3.03
Male	2.90	2.64	2.87	2.84	2.57	2.80
t	4.07	2.30	2.86	1.99	2.16	1.75
Sig.(2-tailed)	0.00*	0.24	0.00*	0.04*	0.03*	0.08

* $p < .05$

The Differences of LLS Among High School Types

One-way ANOVA test results on the strategies used by students that graduated from different types of high schools are shown in Table 5. There are significant differences across the different high school types in the use of memory-related ($F=3.344, p=0.00$), cognitive ($F=7.593, p=0.00$), metacognitive ($F=3.206, p=0.00$), affective ($F=3.830, p=0.01$) and social strategies ($F=3.501, p=0.01$). Considering the different high school types, the students graduated from vocational and technical high schools use all LLS, except for memory-related strategy, more frequent than others. The students that graduated from general high schools use memory-related strategies.

Table 5.

Summary of the One-Way ANOVA Test Among High School Types

Strategies	High School Type	Means of Strategies	df	F	Sig.	Sig. Differences
Memory-related	GH	3.48	3,206	3.344	0.02*	GH-TTH
	TTH	3.33				
	ASH	3.02				
	VTH	3.28				
Cognitive	GH	2.93	3,206	7.593	0.00*	ASH-TTH, VTH-TTH
	TTH	2.93				
	ASH	2.48				
	VTH	3.11				
Compensation	GH	3.09	3,206	1.412	0.24	-
	TTH	3.18				
	ASH	2.97				
	VTH	3.25				
Metacognitive	GH	3.15	3,206	8.302	0.00*	GH-TTH, ASH-TTH, VTH-TTH
	TTH	3.09				
	ASH	2.62				
	VTH	3.33				

Affective	GH	2.84	3,206	3.830	0.01*	VTH-TTH
	TTH	2.81				
	ASH	2.50				
	VTH	2.92				
Social	GH	3.01	3,206	3.501	0.01*	VTH-TTH
	TTH	3.00				
	ASH	2.71				
	VTH	3.17				

*GH (General High School), TTH (Teacher's Training High School), ASH (Anatolian-Science High School) VTH (Vocational and Technical High Schools)

The Differences in Levels of LLS Based on Academic Achievement

One-Way ANOVA test results indicate that there are statistically significant differences between different levels of LLS in terms of English course grades. Table 6 indicates that more successful language learners use more learning strategies than poor language learners. Post-hoc comparisons using Scheffe test were conducted in order to evaluate pairwise differences among the means. As it can be seen from Table 6, in memory-related strategies, there are statistically significant differences across low and medium levels, low and high levels ($F= 6.37$, $p= 0.002$). In cognitive strategies, there are statistically significant differences across low and medium levels, low and high levels ($F= 10.37$, $p= 0.000$). In compensation strategies, there are statistically significant differences across low and high levels ($F= 5.95$, $p= 0.003$). In metacognitive strategies, there are statistically significant differences across low and medium levels, low and high levels ($F= 12.88$, $p= 0.000$). In affective strategies, there seems to be a significant difference ($F= 3.66$, $p= 0.027$), whereas the post-hoc test carried out indicates that there is no significant pairwise comparison. One-way ANOVA test examines both pairwise and complex comparisons, but the pairwise comparisons for the related variables do not indicate significant differences in Scheffe test. In social strategies, there are statistically significant differences across low and medium, medium and high, low and high levels ($F= 11.71$, $p= 0.000$). Regarding the means of course grades, the most successful students ($\bar{x}=78.20$) use social strategies.

Table 6.

One-way ANOVA Test Results of Differences in Levels of LLS Use in terms of English Course Grades

Strategies	Strategy Level	Means of Course Grades	df	F	Sig.	Sig. Differences
Memory-related	Low	66.26	2, 207	6.37	0.002*	L-M, L-H
	Med	73.35				
	High	75.52				
Cognitive	Low	67.39	2, 207	10.37	0.000*	L-M, L-H
	Med	74.49				
	High	77.68				
Compensation	Low	67.66	2, 207	5.95	0.003*	L-H
	Med	72.62				
	High	76.17				
Metacognitive	Low	66.19	2, 207	12.88	0.000*	L-M, L-H
	Med	74.32				
	High	77.41				

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Affective	Low	69.94	2, 207	3.66	0.027*	-
	Med	74.29				
	High	76.00				
Social	Low	66.48	2, 207	11.71	0.000*	L-M, M-H, L-H
	Med	72.96				
	High	78.20				

* $p < .05$ - L-Low Level, M-Medium Level, H-High Level

Discussion and Conclusion

There are several studies regarding LLS used by Turkish students learning English in Turkey. This study is carried out to shed some light on the LLS used by Turkish students learning English as a foreign language to fulfill their academic requirements. The results of this study have revealed that the students at the Faculty of Educational Sciences use all LLS at medium level. This finding is consistent with those put forward by Bekleyen (2005), Algan (2006), Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006), Yalçın (2006), Cesur (2008), Chun-huan (2010), Akıllılar and Uslu (2011) and Aksoy (2012). In this study, the students use memory-related strategies most among all LLS. In the context of strategy use, the studies done in this field stated different findings. So, the findings in this research are different from Deneme (2008), Jing (2010), Al-Shabou, Asassfeh and Alsboul (2010), Wong and Nunan (2010) and Akıllılar and Uslu (2011), Gülsoy (2011) in the context of which strategy they used. The results' variety of different studies can be explained depending on the characteristics of the students. The students in this research are quite homogeneous. In other words, they did predominantly not graduate from foreign language oriented high schools.

Some studies indicate that the students in Turkey mainly face multiple choice questions (Mertler, 1999; Güven, 2001; Çakan, 2004). This situation leads them to memorise particular algorithms, therefore this type of item format encourages students to use memory related strategies. Moreover, as the grade level increases, students feel more insufficient in terms of academic achievement. Instead of comprehending, they tend to memorise what they learn (Berberoğlu, 2009). Consequently, the use of memory strategies in any kind of learning environment is a result of the examination and educational system in Turkey.

In consistent with the previous studies, this study also reveals that female students use LLS more frequently than male students. There are many studies regarding LLS which were carried out to find out the differences by gender. One of them is Ghee, Ismail and Kabilan's research (2010), they found out that female students use LLS more frequently than the male students. Ehrman and Oxford (1989), Bekleyen (2005), Algan (2006), Yalçın (2006), Cesur (2008), Gürata (2008), Aslan (2009), Al-Shabou, Asassfeh and Alsboul (2010) and Gülsoy (2011) also found that female students use LLS more than male students.

The results of this study also indicate that there are statistically significant differences between the students graduated from vocational and technical high schools and other high school types. From this aspect, the findings differ from the research by Akıllılar and Uslu (2011). The result is peculiar to this study.

According to the results of the studies about LLS, use of strategies is an important factor which affects academic achievement in English and more successful students use LLS more frequently (Oxford, 1993; Green & Oxford, 1995; Bozaltı, 1999; Ehrman et. al., 2003, Griffiths, 2003; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006 ; Magogve & Oliver, 2007; Rahimi, Riazı & Saif, 2008; Aslan, 2009; Shabou, Asassfeh & Alsbouh, 2010; Ghee, Ismail & Kabilan, 2010). The results of this research consistently show that there are statistically significant differences between low and high levels of LLS use with respect to English course grades. That finding indicates that more successful learners use LLS at high level. Considering the use of LLS in the context of achievement, the

most successful learners use social strategies. That finding can be explained due to the fact that the language learners in the Faculty of Educational Sciences are at elementary level, so they need more clarification, verification and correction. More proficient learners do not need correction or social encourage in demonstrating skills.

Understanding of what make learners successful and unsuccessful is an important issue in foreign language teaching. Therefore, teaching students how to learn a foreign language is a crucial matter. Educators should help students to become aware of LLS in order to be more successful. The experimental research by Abdelhafez (2006), Aydemir (2007), Erkan (2005) show that teaching students how to use LLS has a positive effect on learning. Moreover, studies conducted with teachers also indicate that they also need training for "teaching language learning strategies." They are not aware of the importance of LLS. They claim inservice training (Deneme, 2008; Bada ve Yapıcı, 2004; Özer, 2002).

The results of this study have presented LLS used by the students at the Faculty of Educational Sciences. This is a homogeneous group. They need to be encouraged to use LLS at higher level to become more effective language learners. Consequently, the findings of this study will bring to light the future studies which will be conducted by researchers and educators in foreign language education, especially concerning Turkish students learning English as a foreign language.

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