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INVESTIGATING THE PREFERRED LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF TAIWANESE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

In Taiwan, the Ministry of Education has implemented new curriculum guidelines which promote the need for more communicative-based English classrooms. These guidelines coincide with the country's implementation of bilingual education at all levels of schooling. With new bilingual programs, students may need to utilize new language learning strategies (LLSs) as teachers adopt new communicative-based methods. Few studies have been done on the LLSs used by elementary school students in EFL contexts, especially in Taiwan. Furthermore, there is conflicting literature on the differences in LLS-usage between genders and levels of English proficiency. This quantitative, quasi-experimental design investigated the LLS-usage of 111 5th-grade students from southern Taiwan. A bilingual version of Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was used to evaluate the students' LLS preferences. The results showed that overall, the students used compensation and social strategies the most, and they used cognitive and affective strategies the least. There were significant differences between the amount and types of LLSs used between genders and English proficiencies, with English proficiency proving to be the strongest indicator of LLS-usage. Implications and suggestions for research are provided.

Key words: language learning strategies; EFL; bilingual education; Taiwan bilingual policy

INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the Executive Yuan in Taiwan approved a blueprint that would ultimately develop Taiwan into a bilingual nation by the year 2030 (Financial Supervisory Commission, 2019). This announcement coincided with the Ministry of Education's (MOE) curriculum guidelines for schools across Taiwan, which called for more bilingual instruction and communicative-based classrooms (Ministry of Education, 2022). Thus, numerous bilingual programs have been adopted at all levels of education. These communicative-centered approaches are significantly different from the traditional teacher-centered, test-based approaches that have dominated Taiwan's education system for decades (Chen & Tsai, 2012; Hung, 2018). According to the MOE, one key component to the success of Taiwanese future achievements in bilingual education is to adopt appropriate language learning strategies (LLSs) at each stage of learning (Ministry of Education, 2022). The investigation of children's use of LLSs has so far been understudied (Milla & Gutierrez-Mangado, 2019). Furthermore, children are cognitively and socially different from adults, so we cannot generalize results from older students to younger ones (Purdie & Oliver, 1999). In previous research, it has been shown that young learners of a foreign language may not utilize LLSs effectively or at all for the promotion of communicative competence (Gunning & Oxford, 2014; Habók & Magyar, 2018; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Platsidou & Sipitanou, 2015; Purdie & Oliver, 1999), especially in Asian countries such as Taiwan (Su, 2003).

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

According to Oxford, (1990) language learning strategies are "steps taken by students to enhance their own learning" (p. 1). LLSs can be defined as being either direct or indirect. Direct strategies can be classified broadly into three specific strategy choices—memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies (Oxford, 1990). Indirect strategies include metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. This taxonomy of foreign language learning strategies from Oxford has

now been utilized for more than 30 years, and it could be considered to be outdated, especially with the implementation of more advanced technology and teaching methodologies that incorporate more blended learning classrooms (Shakarami et al., 2017). However, today, Oxford's definitions and classifications of foreign language learning strategies are still the most widely accepted and used (Habók et al., 2021; Platsidou & Sipitanou, 2015). She did her model to include 'meta-strategies,' encompassing metacognitive, meta-affective, and meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies (Griffith & Oxford, 2014; Oxford, 2016). However, at the inception of this study, she had not yet elaborated on this classification. Therefore, my study relied on her original taxonomy, which is also supported by the SILL, which is described later on. This choice is supported by other recent studies done on LLSs (Habók et al., 2021). Furthermore, in the study done by Shakarami et al. (2017), the authors concluded that adaptations to Oxford's classification taxonomy should be made for online learning instances, specifically compensation strategies for when students are not in a group setting. However, in my study, the students were investigated in a classroom environment, so Oxford's taxonomy still applies.

Oxford's classifications include those strategies that are most consistent with students' actual patterns of strategy use (Hsaio & Oxford, 2002) as well as supporting several respected learning theories, including cognitive theories of declarative and procedural knowledge, schema building, and metacognition (Oxford, 2011). Affective theories about the essentialness of motivation, student emotions, and learning attitudes are also included. Cognitive and affective strategies play an important role in blended learning classrooms where students need to improve their critical thinking skills while interacting with online materials (Yang et al., 2013). Furthermore, the integration of technology in the classroom can alter teaching pedagogies (Geer et al., 2017), as classrooms become more student centered.

From Rubin (1975), we know that strong language learners look for opportunities to improve themselves by using strategies that facilitate the learning process. Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) found that ESL students studying in the USA relied on metacognitive and

social strategies the most. They reasoned that the students were highly motivated to learn, so they utilized the most effective strategies for success. The results support the fact that the learners' context favors their strategy use as Western schools are noted for promoting LLSs and independent learning. However, it should be noted that ESL and EFL contexts are very different, in that students in the latter have much fewer opportunities to interact with the target language. Therefore, we cannot assume that LLSs used in an ESL context will be parallel to those used in an EFL one. We need to investigate what LLSs are most typically used by children in EFL-specific contexts in order to best facilitate them.

In Taiwan, Yang (2017) concluded that instructors need to ensure students are made aware of the numerous learning strategies available to them, as well as how to use them efficiently and effectively. He found that the students relied on strategies from previous language learning scenarios and admitted to changing their strategies to match their teachers' instructional styles. At the junior high school level, Chen (2009) found that Taiwanese EFL students relied mostly on compensation strategies and used cognitive and affective strategies infrequently. The author concluded by calling for teachers to directly draw their students' attention to the types of strategies that are available to them when learning English.

Language learning strategies used by students may be the single most important factor in determining their successes or failures (Oxford, 1989). In a bilingual elementary school, Purdie and Oliver (1999) found that "Organizing and Evaluating" and "Learning with Others" were the most commonly used types of LLSs. Furthermore, there was a direct correlation between the amount of time spent studying in Australia and the amount of cognitive and remembering strategies used by the children. The choice of strategies used depended on the levels of the students' self-efficacy and attitudes towards learning English, which often can be lower in Taiwan (Chen, 2013).

Milla and Gutierrez-Mangado (2019) investigated the LLS-use of Spanish primary school students in a CLIL program. They found that the fifth-grade students used more memory strategies than the sixth-grade students did and that social strategies were popular with the learners as there were numerous group activities. The students used

compensation and cognitive strategies the least, which differed from Lan and Oxford's (2003) study in which social strategies and memory strategies were the least used. The differences were attributed to the different contexts; again we see differing results on LLSs between EFL and ESL learning contexts.

In Taiwan, the education system has traditionally been teacher-centered and test-driven. Very few studies have been done on children's use of LLSs in English classes which were communicative-based in approach. One study done by Su (2003) examined the LLSs used by elementary school students in Taipei City. She found that the students preferred to use association and social strategies and used compensation and assistance strategies the least. Furthermore, Su left out metacognitive strategies as the subjects were considered too immature to utilize them effectively. However, Su did call for research to be done on children's metacognitive strategies in the future.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were answered at the conclusion of this study.

1. What were the elementary school students' preferred language learning strategies?
2. Were there any significant differences between the types of strategies used by the students?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A quantitative, quasi-experimental design was implemented. It was not possible for a control group to be added due to administrative concerns, and it was not possible for random sampling to be used. It is still considered effective to use quasi-experimental designs while investigating students' use of LLSs (Oxford, 2011).

The participants were 111 fifth-grade public elementary school students studying in southern Taiwan. In Taiwan, English classes officially begin in the 3rd grade of primary school. However, at this

particular school, English classes began in the 1st grade. Furthermore, many preschools and kindergartens offer English instruction as well. The students in this study had at least two and a half years of English instruction, with most of them having more than four and a half years. A total of five homeroom classes were used. There were 55 males and 56 females. The participants had four 40-minute classes of English per week. For this study, three of the classes per week were taught by their Taiwanese English teacher, who used a mixture of English and Mandarin to teach. Most English teachers in Taiwan use a mixture of English and Chinese when teaching English, with a higher emphasis on the latter (Lin, 2022). One class per week was taught by a native-speaker of English.

Prior to the beginning of the study, permission to evaluate the children was given by the appropriate school administration, the students' homeroom teachers, as well as from the children's parents. Letters of introduction were sent home to the parents, and they offered their consent by signing the letters and returning them to school. The students were given an English proficiency test at the beginning of the semester for comparison purposes as well as for grouping in class. The GEPT Kids practice test was chosen to assess the students' English proficiency. The test was designed by The Language Training and Testing Center in Taiwan specifically for examining Taiwanese primary school students' ability to comprehend and communicate in basic English. The vocabulary on the test includes approximately 600 words from the wordlist of the Grade 1-9 curriculum guidelines developed by the MOE (Ministry of Education, 2022). Basic English grammar structures that are commonly used in teaching materials (i.e., course textbooks) are included. The test includes sections on reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The questions are targeted towards students at the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) A1 proficiency level (The Language Training and Testing Center, 2015). The GEPT Kids test has been proven valid for determining students' English proficiency (Yao et al., 2022). The GEPT Kids was also deemed reliable by the same study with a Cronbach's alpha of .93. The students' results can be seen in Table 1. Based on the results of the GEPT Kids practice test, the students were separated into two groups, high- and low-proficient in English. It is not uncommon to

use two comparison groups instead of three when attempting to determine significant differences when specifically attempting to determine how the most and the least proficient students behave in a class (Huang & Tsai, 2003; Riazantseva, 2009; Wu, 2019). There is often overlap between the mid-proficiency group with the other two groups; therefore, they were not included in this study.

Table 1

Participants' Results on the GEPT Kids Practice Test

	High Score / Percentage	Low Score / Percentage	Mean Score / Percentage
Listening (25 Points)	25 / 100%	6 / 24.00%	19 / 76.00%
Reading (30 Points)	30 / 100%	11 / 36.67%	22 / 73.33 %
Writing (20 Points)	20 / 100%	0 / 0.00%	10 / 50.00%
All Items (75 Points)	74 / 98.67%	23 / 30.67%	51 / 68.00%

To evaluate the participants' LLS-usage, Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was used. The SILL is a 50-item questionnaire that contains six sections, containing different types of LLSs. The six categories of LLSs are: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. The SILL uses a 5-point Likert scale to assess the students' responses. Oxford's SILL has been used in countless studies on the LLSs used by EFL learners in varying contexts for varying ages (Bessai, 2018; Chen, 2009; Milla & Gutierrez-Mangado, 2019; Oxford & Nikos, 1989). For this study, the students were given an English/Mandarin bilingual version in order to ensure comprehensibility. The English items come from Oxford's version 7.0 (Oxford, 1990), and the Chinese version comes from Yang (1992). As an assessment tool, the SILL has proven effective. When a bilingual version of the questionnaire is used for non-native speakers of English in Taiwan, the SILL has been shown to have a Cronbach's alpha ranging from .91 to .95 (Oxford, 1999). Even though Oxford herself has mentioned that her instrument could be outdated, it is still considered by many to be the most effective measurement of LLS-usage (Habók et al., 2021) and is still used by many researchers in varying contexts (Habók et al.,

2021; Yang & Zeng, 2021).

This study was carried out over a total of 20 weeks. The students were given a letter of introduction, and the letters were signed by their parents as a form of consent. Next, the participants were given the GEPT Kids proficiency test. Throughout the semester, the students received teacher-centered instruction from their Taiwanese English teacher, with a priority on vocabulary and grammar learning for three periods per week. The fourth period was allocated to the native-English speaking teacher. This class period was topic-based. The topics included mountains, oceans, and the water cycle. The classes were designed to promote independent learning and classroom interaction in English among their peers and with the teachers. The instruction was given entirely in English. At the beginning of each class, the teacher presented the new vocabulary to the students, and they learned and practiced the new words on Quizlet. After that, the participants were given some communicative tasks in which they had to use the newly-learned vocabulary. Two of the larger tasks were making a digital story about the journey of a drop of water as it went through the water cycle and creating a slideshow presentation showing what animals lived in the mountains and what people liked to do in the mountains for fun. The students were never instructed on the usage of LLSs. At the end of the semester, the students were given the SILL and were asked to complete it using Google Forms.

RESULTS

Students' Preferred Language Learning Strategies

The students' preferred LLSs were examined as a whole group, by gender, and by English proficiency level. Table 2 shows the students' responses on the questionnaires for the group as a whole. Compensation strategies were reported as the most frequently used LLS by the students. Social strategies were the second most used LLS by the students. On the SILL, there was only one mean average (compensation) which was higher than 3, showing that these students used LLSs very infrequently. Overall, the students used both cognitive and affective strategies the least.

Table 2

The Students' Responses to the Questionnaires as a Whole Group

Strategies	Mean	SD	Rank
Compensation	3.119	.861	1
Social	2.905	.856	2
Memory	2.885	.816	3
Metacognitive	2.820	.927	4
Cognitive	2.775	.833	5
Affective	2.659	.869	6

The Students' Preferred LLSs by Gender

The students' usage of LLSs compared by gender can be seen in Table 3. Again, we see compensation strategies as the most used LLS for both genders at the end of the semester. For the two groups, the LLSs of cognitive and affective strategies were reported as the least used. When comparing the frequency of LLS-usage between the two genders, the results show that the females in this study reported using LLSs at a much higher rate than the males. For each type of LLS, the females' mean average was more significant than the males' average. The females had a mean average on the SILL above 3 (somewhat true of me) on all of the LLSs except for cognitive and affective strategies. On the other hand, the males only had a mean average that was higher than 3 on compensation strategies. There was a stark difference between the two genders' reported LLS-use in this class.

Table 3

The Students' Responses to the Questionnaires Based on Gender

Strategies	Gender	Mean	SD	Rank
Compensation	Male	3.015	.883	1
	Female	3.220	.834	1
Social	Male	2.688	.831	3
	Female	3.119	.833	2
Memory	Male	2.715	.775	2
	Female	3.052	.826	4
Metacognitive	Male	2.576	.916	4
	Female	3.060	.882	3
Cognitive	Male	2.573	.802	5
	Female	2.973	.823	5
Affective	Male	2.397	.858	6
	Female	2.917	.807	6

The Students' Preferred LLSs by English Proficiency

The students' responses to the questionnaires were also compared by English proficiency and can be seen in Table 4. As with the entire group of students, and for males and females, we see compensation strategies as the most widely reported LLS for both high- and low-proficient students. It is noteworthy that the low-proficient students' use of cognitive strategies is much less than the high-proficient students. Furthermore, as with gender, the high-proficient students used each type of LLS more than the low-proficient students. The smallest mean difference between the five types of LLSs were affective strategies. The high-proficient students had a mean average above 3 on all of the LLSs except for affective strategies, while the low-proficient students had an average below 3 on all six LLSs. All of the mean averages for the high-proficient group were higher than any other grouping for each individual LLS, making it most likely the strongest indicator of LLS-usage that was investigated in this study.

Table 4

The Students' Responses to the Questionnaires Based on English Proficiency

Strategies	Proficiency	Mean	SD	Rank
Compensation	Low	2.820	.910	1
	High	3.363	.739	1
Social	Low	2.617	.680	2
	High	3.142	.917	2
Memory	Low	2.607	.591	3
	High	3.113	.904	5
Metacognitive	Low	2.451	.724	4
	High	3.122	.970	3
Cognitive	Low	2.361	.635	6
	High	3.114	.828	4
Affective	Low	2.513	.789	5
	High	2.779	.918	6

Differences in the Types of LLSs Used

The second research question determined to answer if there were any significant differences between the types of strategies used by the participants. Furthermore, the types of LLSs used by the different genders and different proficiency levels were also compared for significant differences. To determine if there were any differences between the LLSs used by the students, a one-way repeated measures ANOVA was used to compare the data collected by the questionnaire. The one-way repeated measures ANOVA (Table 5) determined that there were significant differences found among the six LLSs. The test within-subjects effect (Table 6) showed that there were significant differences among multiple LLSs. As a whole group, it was reported by the students that compensation strategies were used significantly more frequently than all of the other LLSs, except for social strategies. There was no significant difference between compensation strategies and social strategies for the group as a whole. As mentioned previously, these were the two most popular LLS-choices for the

students. Furthermore, memory strategies and social strategies were used more often than affective strategies. We can state with confidence that the students least preferred LLSs were affective, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. These are further elaborated on in the Discussion Section.

Table 5

One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Post	13.184	5	2.637	11.049	.000	.091
Error (Strategy)	131.259	550	.239			

Table 6

Pairwise Comparisons on the Questionnaire for the Whole Group

Strategies	Strategies	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.[a]	Lower Bound[a]	Upper Bound[a]
Memory	Cognitive	.110	.058	.602	-.063	.283
	Compensation	-.234*	.075	.035	-.459	-.009
	Metacognitive	.065	.064	.996	-.127	.257
	Affective	.226*	.067	.014	.026	.425
	Social	-.021	.065	1.000	-.215	.174
Cognitive	Memory	-.110	.058	.602	-.283	.063
	Compensation	-.344*	.075	.000	-.569	-.118
	Metacognitive	-.045	.045	.997	-.179	.089
	Affective	.116	.064	.675	-.075	.306
	Social	-.131	.058	.343	-.306	.044
Compensation	Memory	.234*	.075	.035	.009	.459
	Cognitive	.344*	.075	.000	.118	.569
	Metacognitive	.299*	.079	.004	.063	.535
	Affective	.459*	.082	.000	.213	.706
	Social	.213	.071	.051	-.001	.427
Metacognitive	Memory	-.065	.064	.996	-.257	.127
	Cognitive	.045	.045	.997	-.089	.179
	Compensation	-.299*	.079	.004	-.535	-.063
	Affective	.161	.060	.124	-.020	.341
	Social	-.086	.051	.792	-.240	.069
Affective	Memory	-.226*	.067	.014	-.425	-.026
	Cognitive	-.116	.064	.675	-.306	.075
	Compensation	-.459*	.082	.000	-.706	-.213
	Metacognitive	-.161	.060	.124	-.341	.020
	Social	-.246*	.056	.000	-.415	-.078
Social	Memory	.021	.065	1.000	-.174	.215
	Cognitive	.131	.058	.343	-.044	.306
	Compensation	-.213	.071	.051	-.427	.001
	Metacognitive	.086	.051	.792	-.069	.240
	Affective	.246*	.056	.000	.078	.415

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.
* 95% confidence interval for difference; Sidak used for adjustment for multiple comparisons.

When examining the LLSs used by the students in reference to their gender, an independent-samples *t*-test was used to compare the females' and males' preferred LLSs on the questionnaires. The results can be seen in Table 7. The females' reported use was significantly more than the males in the LLSs of memory, cognitive, metacognitive,

affective, and social. Even though the female students did not use compensation strategies significantly more than the males, their reported use was still higher. Compensation strategies were the highest used LLS by the males, and so the difference was not as notable.

Table 7

Independent-Samples T-Test Comparing LLSs Used by Gender

Strategies	*t*	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Lower	Upper
Memory	-2.211	109	.029*	-.63800	-.03488
Cognitive	-2.596	109	.011*	-.70620	-.09477
Compensation	-1.258	109	.211	-.52814	.11797
Metacognitive	-2.835	109	.005*	-.82198	-.14555
Affective	-3.289	109	.001*	-.83290	-.20650
Social	-2.729	109	.007*	-.74429	-.11805

* The results were significant at $p < .05$.

The LLSs were also examined in terms of the participants' English proficiency and compared for significant differences on the questionnaires. The results can be seen in Table 8. The high-proficient students used all of the LLSs significantly more than the low-proficient students except for affective strategies. The results were significant at $p < .05$. Since affective strategies were not utilized very often by any of the groups, there was not a significant difference between the high- and low-proficiency groups.

Table 8

Independent-Samples T-Test Comparing LLSs Used by Different English Proficiency Levels

Strategies	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Lower	Upper
Memory	-3.407	109	.001*	-.80074	-.21179
Cognitive	-5.276	109	.000*	-1.03469	-.46961
Compensation	-3.471	109	.001*	-85368	-.23310
Metacognitive	-4.050	109	.000*	-.99927	-.34258
Affective	-1.613	109	.110	-59147	.06076
Social	-3.364	109	.001*	-.83496	-.21586

* The results were significant at $p < .05$.

DISCUSSION

This section describes some important conclusions made from the data, as well as their corresponding implications for educators and future research. The primary school students in this study used various LLSs for their English learning. Overall, the students did not use LLSs at a very high rate, as many of the mean scores (on the SILL) on the types of strategies used were less than a score of 3, referring to a response of "somewhat true of me". Their lack of utilization of LLSs can be attributed to their lack of English proficiency as a group (Bessai, 2018; Park, 1997) or a possible lack of self-efficacy in using English (Purdie & Oliver, 1999). New learners of a language may not have strategic knowledge, and it might not transfer from their L1 (Oxford, 2011). Teachers should give students direct instruction on LLSs and offer the learners opportunities to put them into practice. According to Oxford, the direct teaching of learning strategies is essential to instruction in a new language and should be assumed as an integral part of the pedagogical process. Explicit instruction of LLSs leads to strategy awareness of how and when to use effective strategies (Gunning & Oxford, 2014). Furthermore, LLS instruction leads to an increase in the frequency of LLSs used (Gunning & Oxford,

2014; Yang & Wang, 2015), and an increase in their successful applications (Amin et al., 2011; Gunning & Oxford, 2014). Caution is needed as LLS training has not always proven successful (Rees-Miller, 1993). Classrooms with too many students may make it challenging to promote effective strategies due to the sheer number of different learning styles present in the classroom (Park, 1997). The first step in the application of strategy instruction is to determine which strategies the students are currently using or not using, as was evident in this study (Oxford, 2011). Furthermore, smaller classrooms may also be beneficial for strategy training (Park, 1997).

As a whole group, the students reported using compensation strategies the most, with social strategies being the second most utilized. In fact, even when comparing between genders and English proficiency, compensation and social strategies were the most popular choices. Only the male group preferred memory strategies over social strategies. Two conclusions can be drawn from these results. The students' overall low proficiency and their young age make it likely that compensation strategies would be a popular choice, as a lower proficiency in the target language means a more limited command of the language than higher proficiency learners (Fernández Dobao, 2002; Tezcan & Deneme, 2016). It is common for compensation strategies to be used by beginning learners (Chen, 2009; Gallardo-del-Puerto et al., 2020). Students who have learned English for a number of years, tend to rely on compensation strategies less (Habók & Magyar, 2018). Furthermore, social strategies seem to be an obvious choice in a classroom setting that implemented pair and group work in every lesson (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). Moreover, the classroom tasks were communicative in nature, and therefore it was likely that the students naturally relied on their partners for assistance while learning the new language (Milla & Gutierrez-Mangado, 2019). The students' lack of utilized cognitive strategies could be directly related to the current stage of their cognitive development (Milla & Gutierrez-Mangado, 2019; Oxford, 2011; Su, 2003). A focus on lower-order thinking processes at the childhood age can lead to the learner's inability to use cognitive strategies (Straková, 2013). In Taiwan, the traditional teacher-dominated classroom can lead to a learning environment where students do not activate their higher-

order thinking skills enough (Hou, 2018). If we look at models of cognitive information-processing, students need to practice using strategies and the knowledge that goes along with them in order to turn the information from declarative to procedural knowledge (Oxford, 2011). Repeated practice is the key to achieving successful LLS-use. However, their lack of cognitive strategic knowledge precludes them from the actual practice stage. Finally, the students in this study reported using affective strategies the least, which aligns with the typical Asian learning context (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). Students who have anxiety about making mistakes in class often do not use affective strategies as much. Moreover, when teachers focus on the cognitive aspect of learning in a teacher-centered classroom, it is more unlikely that affective strategies will develop, which could harm students' motivation and self-efficacy (Oxford, 2011; Oxford & Nikos, 1989). It is important that teachers discuss LLSs with their students, even at the primary school level. It is possible that the students in this study were not even aware of the multitude of LLSs available to them until they completed the questionnaire. Furthermore, student-centered classrooms in which errors are welcomed are necessary for the promotion of affective strategies and more communicative-based learning.

Even though comparing genders in today's world can be considered somewhat controversial, the results from this study clearly showed that the female students used LLSs significantly more than the males did. Out of the six LLSs that were investigated in this study, the females' mean average was significantly higher than the males' average in five of them. Only affective strategies were not significantly different due to neither gender frequently utilizing them. There have been numerous studies that have shown female students at the elementary or secondary school level utilizing LLSs more often than males (Doró & Habók, 2013; Milla & Gutierrez-Mangado, 2019; Su, 2003). Doró and Habók (2013) found that the young females in their study showed a much more active involvement in and more dedication towards their foreign language learning. It could be argued that age plays more of a role in LLS-usage than gender does (Ahsanah, 2020; Milla & Gutierrez-Mangado, 2019), as other studies with older participants have not found a gender effect when investigating

language learning strategies (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Nisbet et al, 2005; Radwan, 2011) Furthermore, it has been shown that females tend to have more motivation to learn and thus utilize more LLSs (Rivero-Menéndez et al., 2018). Hou (2015) investigated over 520 elementary school students in Taiwan and compared numerous social factors on EFL learning. The results showed that, overall, the female students showed greater motivation to learn English than the male students did. However, the students' learning experience can also play a large role in their motivation to learn, and this could be regardless of gender (Fan & Feng, 2012). This topic needs more research (Milla & Gutierrez-Mangado, 2019). Further studies could focus specifically on a difference between genders of children and adults, as well as determining if there is a strong correlation between age or gender. Furthermore, the students' learning motivation and self-efficacy should be investigated to determine if it is their own beliefs and desire to learn that determines the amount of LLSs they use or if in fact it is a product of their gender. Regardless, this study showed that the young males who participated reported using LLSs very infrequently, and the reason why should be determined so as to improve the situation in future language classrooms. Direct instruction of LLSs could be very beneficial for all young learners.

In this study, the results also clearly showed that the students who were in the high-proficient group used significantly more LLSs than those who were in the low-proficient group. It could be that proficiency was the main reason differentiating the high and low users of LLSs. These results are commonly found at all levels of learning (Bessai, 2018; Milla & Gutierrez-Mangado, 2019; Oxford & Nikos, 1989). The most obvious reason could be that at low levels of proficiency and at a young age, these children lacked strategic knowledge and therefore had no knowledge base on which to draw from (Bessai, 2018). Students at low-proficiency levels should be taught LLSs directly in order to build up the base of knowledge to further promote language acquisition and allow them to be successful language users outside of the classroom (Park, 1997). Teachers should offer strategic knowledge along with content knowledge during instruction (Bessai, 2018). Classroom pedagogy should be designed in a manner which allows learners to acquire language learning

strategy knowledge of all types, while at the same time offering them a platform to practice the strategies in context. This will allow students to practice using LLSs and develop those that benefit them the most based on their own strengths and learning styles (Park, 1997).

LIMITATIONS

While the results from this study will be valuable to the corpus of research done on the LLSs of children, there are a few limitations that need to be mentioned. First of all, the students were not interviewed upon completion of the course. Although children often are hard to get detailed responses from in terms of their learning preferences, their responses could have given more insight into the reasons for their LLS usage or lack thereof. Furthermore, classroom observations were not utilized; the only form of data collected came from the questionnaires. It has been shown that sometimes children may not always report honestly for fear of displeasing their teachers. Moreover, the students may have been under the impression that they had to fulfill certain expectations by giving certain answers. Had the students been observed using their LLSs, the data could have been better triangulated.

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