

Grammar Learning Strategies Use of Preparatory School Students: Gender in Focus

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Abstract: This study explores grammar learning strategies used by preparatory school grade 11 students in Addis Ababa. From a total of 991 students at Medhanialem preparatory school a sample of 264 (117 Male and 147 Female) students were selected randomly and completed the 35 items Grammar Learning Strategies Questionnaire (GLSQ), which was modified from Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The result showed the students were moderate grammar learning strategy users, and Compensation Strategies were the most frequently used strategies, while Affective Strategies are the least frequently used strategies. Even though there is no significant difference between male and female participants in their overall strategy use, gender difference is observed in the least frequently used strategies. The study revealed that males indicated that Affective Strategies were their least preferred strategies while females stated that Metacognitive Strategies are their least preferred ones. The result of the study informs that grammar learning strategies need to be important focus areas of the students' language learning process.

Key words: grammar learning strategies, gender

Introduction

During the past 30 years or so we have seen grammar move from a central position in language teaching to positions of less importance,

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and back, although it has never again reached previous importance. Some scholars such as Hinkel and Fotos (2002) believe that teaching/learning of foreign language grammar has a paramount importance for good command of the foreign language where there is no natural way of acquiring the language though scholars like Krashen (1981, 1982) and Krashen and Terrell (1983) criticize the formal instruction of grammar.

Muncie (2002: 183) states that grammar is just as important an instrument of communication, and a text cannot be written cohesively without attention being paid to how meaning is being expressed through grammar. Briefly, knowing grammar is important since it is a means of achieving linguistic accuracy- the more accurately a message is conveyed, the less the opportunities for misunderstanding in communication. Whereas, if there is a lack of grammatical competence, communicators do not participate willingly and fully so that communication breaks down.

However, currently in Ethiopia a considerable number of students are attending higher institutions and colleges with a very weak knowledge of English grammar and little ability to use the language accurately (Haregewain, 2008, Tewodros, 2016). As a result, it is very difficult to uphold quality of education if the learners are deficient in grammar throughout their college stay. Although the main cause of learner difficulties in grammar learning can be attributed to different variables, quite recently, scholars (Anderson, 2005; Chamot, 2004; Ehrman, Leaver and Oxford, 2003; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975) are drawing attention to 'learning strategies' that learners employ in grammar learning as one of the major factors for either success or failure in learning English grammar. Thus, since the ability to use points of grammar in an accurate, meaningful and appropriate way (Larsen-Freeman 2003) is a high priority for many language learners and, therefore, exploring the strategies that help the learner develop the grammar of the language has to be the focus of language research.

For O'Malley and Chamot (1990:1) the concept of learning strategies is characterized as *the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information*. By the same token, Oxford (1990) defines it as specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, and more transferable to new situations. As a result, teachers of English and language researchers are trying new ways to help the students to develop strategies in order to become capable in learning a foreign or a second language. Most spent time to learn what students do while learning a foreign language. Researchers argued that students' learning strategy choice is related to students' purposes and the task they are engaged in (Oxford, 1990:8). On the contrary, all students have learning strategies though some are successful and some are not.

As a result, several studies attempted to identify variables which could influence the choice and use of language learning strategies. They investigated how the use of language- learning strategies are affected by learner specific variables, such as age, gender, language proficiency, motivation, anxiety, aptitude, and cultural background (e.g., Ahmadi and Mahmoodi, 2012; Aslan, 2009; Ghavamnia, Kassaian and Dabaghi, 2011; Gurata, 2008; Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006; Li, 2005; Rahimi, Riazi and Safi, 2008; Salahshour et al., 2013). However, it seems that none of them are interested in the most important language element, grammar. Anderson (2005: 766) argues that there is a need to research on *learning strategies that L2 learners use to learn grammar and to understand the elements of grammar*. Though these studies focus on the identification, description and classification of learning strategies, there is a gap in establishing their value, investigate mediating variables and determine the contributions of strategies-based instruction in relation with specific language skill such as grammar. In addition, since the cultural context of the learners is a cause for the difference for students learning strategy use (Rubin, 1975), the need to investigate strategy use in different countries probably yield a better understanding in the area.

In Ethiopia, it is believed that gender is the major factor which determines differences in all aspects including education. The gender gap between boys and girls is wide and has become a major concern to the education system to narrow the disparity. Currently, in Ethiopian schools, female learners' enrollment is significantly increasing in all levels of academic setting. However, their number seems to be slightly declined in higher educational levels such as colleges and universities. Additionally, girls' participation is less in high school English lessons as compared with boys. In Ethiopia where gender is a stereotype that determines all aspect of learning and achievement (Endaweke, 2008), students, ways of language learning widen the gap between male and female effectiveness. As a result, female learners are said to be less effective in English learning and their expected overall achievement is also lower than male learners (Atkins, Hailom, and Nuru, 1995). Thus, investigating learning strategies used by preparatory school students to learn grammar and identify the relationship between gender and the use of grammar learning strategies of students have its contribution to address the current challenges of language teaching in Ethiopia.

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate the grammar learning strategy use of preparatory school students. In doing so the specific objective of the study is to

- describe the grammar learning strategies used by preparatory school students in their grammar learning process, and
- investigate the difference between male and female in grammar learning strategy use

Research Questions

The present research has two research questions.

- What are the grammar learning strategies used by preparatory school students?
- Is there a significant difference in grammar learning strategies use due to gender?

Literature Review

The Role of Grammar in Language Learning

The positions of grammar in various methodologies and approaches to language teaching can be viewed in terms of three general instructional approaches. Previously grammar had a central position in language teaching since it was believed that knowing the structure of the language develop learners' intellectual ability and accurate production of the language in spontaneous language use. However, many researchers have questioned this assumption and the traditional methods based on the exclusive teaching of grammar were criticized because of learners' inability to use the language communicatively though they knew grammar rules. So, new approaches that foster exposure to meaningful communication emerged (Hinkel and Fotos, 2002; Nassaji and Fotos, 2011; Richards and Rodgers, 2001). These communicative approaches gave no formal grammar instruction assuming that the learners would acquire the forms and vocabulary naturally, during the process of comprehending and responding to the input.

The negation of the importance of grammar in language teaching was supported by Krashen (1981, 1982) and Krashen and Terrell (1983). Besides, his model of second language learning and the distinction he made between acquisition and learning provided ample theoretical support for the principles of communicative language teaching

(Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Krashen argues that learners should “acquire” language unconsciously and implicitly as a result of exposure to comprehensible input rather than “learn” it consciously through explicit teaching of grammatical rules (Krashen, 1981; 1982; Krashen and Terrell, 1983).

On the other hand, many researchers have tried to restore the role of grammar. Ellis (2006) for instance argues that instructed learning may require for attaining advanced level of grammatical competence and performance since grammatical competence is one component of communicative competence. He believes that the teaching of different grammatical structures in meaningful context influences proficiency in language learning. In addition, Hinkel and Fotos (2002) reported that instructed grammar learning can serve as communicative input, based on which learners can internalize grammar rules. This is seen as especially important for the EFL situation, in which communicative exposure to the target language is usually lacking.

Likewise, Zhang (2009) asserts that grammar instruction can help learners acquire grammar they would not have learned on their own, otherwise learners reach a language plateau beyond which it is very difficult to progress or their linguistic competence fossilizes. In this process of learning the grammar of the language, EFL learners empower themselves with certain techniques which they use intentionally when learning grammar. These techniques are called grammar learning strategies by which learners gain grammatical knowledge in order to learn language easily, quickly, and more pleasantly. These strategies also make it more likely that new grammar is applied in new situations (Oxford, 1990).

Grammar Learning Strategies

Oxford, Rang Lee and Park (2007) describe grammar learning strategies as ... *actions and thoughts that learners consciously employ to make language learning and/ or language use easier, more effective,*

more efficient, and more enjoyable" (cited in Pawlak, 2009). Similarly, to all other types of strategic behaviors, grammar learning strategies possess distinctive characteristics as summarized by Griffiths (2008) and cited in Pawlak (2009). These are: (1) they are actions to be taken by the learner; (2) Their application is at least partly conscious; (3) They are optional means learners choose; (4) Their use entails goal-oriented, purposeful activity, and (5) They are used to regulate, facilitate, and control the process of learning.

Regarding researches on the exploration of grammar learning strategies, a local study by Temesgen Mereba (2013) shows that the students' perceived use of grammar learning strategies is different from their actual usage. The study result shows that respondents use all the six strategies. However, the result of the think aloud technique revealed that the students use only three (Cognitive, Compensation, and Memory strategies) of the six strategies. This study indicates that even though most of the learners had information about the use of learning strategies, some of them did not have any information about learning strategies use.

Additionally, the findings of Mystkowska-Wiertelak's (2008) investigation on the use of grammar learning strategies of Polish secondary school students indicates that the students use all the six strategies. In the study, many students are reported to use modern technology to establish and sustain contacts with the native speakers apart from using traditional teaching aids such as dictionaries and grammar books.

Another study that aimed to investigate the use of grammar learning strategies and student achievement of English preparatory classes in Turkey was conducted by Yalcin (2005). This study found no significant relationship between grammar leaning strategy use and achievement. Likewise, the result of a study by Pawlak (2009) on the relationship between grammar learning strategies and language attainment of English department students also failed to find evidence for the

existence of positive relationship between the use of grammar learning strategies and attainment.

Oxford (2001) arguing that strategy use may account for up to 61 percent of the variability in English proficiency scores and Chamot (2004: 18) stating that “Differences between more and less proficient language learners have been found in the number and range of strategies used, in how the strategies are applied to the task, and in the appropriateness of the strategies for the task”. Despite this significant role of grammar learning strategies in language learning, finding a comprehensive grammar learning strategy classification is unrealistic.

One of the attempts to propose a grammar learning strategies classification was made by Oxford, Rang Lee and Park (2007). The researchers tried to make a distinction between three types of grammar learning strategies that can be linked with three main grammar teaching instructions. The first strategy is reflective of implicit L2 teaching that includes a focus on form, which pays more attention to form in terms of meaning and message conveyance. The second strategy is based on explicit inductive L2 learning which depends on using the input data to discover patterns and rules. The last category of grammar learning strategies is applicable to explicit deductive learning that is connected to the application of grammatical rules presented by the teacher in different types of activities. However, this classification seems to disregard the learners and learner centered approach which the common practice in the research context. In addition, according to Pawlak (2009) such it depends on mainly understanding and remembering grammatical rules without giving enough emphasis to the importance of practicing the grammatical structures and meaning.

Though a complete theoretical framework of grammar learning strategies hasn't been provided yet and thus more studies are needed to establish an inclusive taxonomy that could identify and classify what techniques learners use to learn grammar, using existing language learning strategies training in grammar learning strategy study seems

relevant. Oxford (1990) proposed a comprehensive classification system of language learning strategies using the two major groups proposed by Rubin's (1981) model; direct (memory, cognitive and Compensation strategies) and indirect (metacognitive, affective and social strategies).

Memory strategies help learners to relate new information to existing ones or relating one grammatical rule or word to another in order to create association in memory but do not necessarily involve deep understanding. Whereas, cognitive strategies enable the learners to manipulate grammatical rules by practicing the grammar rule meaningfully in a realistic setting such as, by participating in conversation, reading a book or article, listening to a lecture, or writing a letter in the new grammar structure. Compensation strategies, on the other hand, serve as auto fillers in learning a language where information gaps occur in understanding or applying grammar rules (Oxford, 1990; 2003).

In addition, Metacognitive strategies allow learners to evaluate their own grammar learning pattern and coordinate the learning process. Besides, affective strategies help learners gain control and regulate personal emotions, attitudes, and values. Moreover, social strategies are actions taken by learners so as to seek support or interact with other learners or more proficient speakers of the language (Oxford, 1990; 2003).

Gender and Learning Strategies

Gender is considered as an important factor affecting the choice of learning strategies in language learning and is said to have a profound effect on strategy choice (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989 cited in Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006). It has been found by many researchers that males and females employ different strategies in relation to their gender characteristics. However, studies which have examined the relationship between gender and strategy use have come to mixed conclusions.

The results of the majority of studies (Oxford and Nyikos (1989), cited in Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006; Gurata, 2008; Tam, 2013) indicate higher use of strategies by females than males. Hence, females were reported to use general study strategies, formal- rule related practice strategies, and conversational input elicitation strategies because of their desire for good grades and need for social approval (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989, cited in Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006). Likewise, male students were found less willing to take a provocative role in communicating and seeking help from other English learners or speakers to improve their English skills (Tam, 2013). In the same token, females reported using more Metacognitive, Social and Affective strategies than the males (Gurata, 2008).

However, contrary to the above studies, Radwan's (2011) study revealed that male students used more social strategies than female students since the culture of the society gives men more responsibility in the major political and social dimensions. However, the conservative nature of culture, customs and habits prevents females to develop communicative abilities in the language with other people. On the other hand, a study of Rahimi, Riazi and Saif (2008) reported that gender did not have a significant overall effect on the use of language learning strategies. Moreover, one of the important issue which Oxford (1994) recommends is that teachers need to learn to identify and understand their students' individual differences, even they need become more aware that their teaching styles are appropriate to their learners strategies (cited in Fazeli, 2011) .

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this study were grade 11 students at Medhanealem Preparatory school Gullelesub city Addis Ababa. From a total number of 991 students 264 (117 Male and 147 Female) grade 11 participants were randomly selected. The sample size was determined with a 95%

confidence level and 5 margin of error (Kotari, 2004). The return rate of the questionnaire was 100% since it was distributed while the students were in class at the presence of the researcher.

Instrument

Questionnaire was used to collect data and information about the participants' use of grammar learning strategies. Thus, in order to gather valuable information from data sources, Oxford's (1990) version 7.0 ESL/EFL Strategy Inventory for Language Learners (SILL) was adapted. Therefore, the SILL was modified as it was convenient to explore the learners' grammar learning strategies. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire tested. The reliability of the questionnaire is 0.81. This modified Grammar Learning Strategies Questionnaires (GLSQ) consisted of two parts. The first part contained questions used to elicit information related with the learners' background such as age, gender, and field of study. The second part consisted of 35 statements grouped under the six categories as proposed by Oxford (1990). Part 1 included 7 statements related to Memory Strategies. Part 2 involved 8 statements about Cognitive Strategies. Part 3 consisted of 3 statements on Compensation Strategies. Part 4 contained 8 statements about Metacognitive Strategies. Part 5 consisted of 5 statements for Affective Strategies, and part 6 consisted of 4 statements on Social Strategies. The participants were required to respond on a 5- point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (Never or almost never true of me) to 5 (always or almost always true of me). The participants took about 20-25 minutes to finish.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data on participants' use of grammar learning strategies were acquired and analyzed using descriptive statistics. In addition, inferential statistics specifically an independent samples t- test was employed for the purpose of evaluating the difference between the means of male and female participants' strategies use. The outcome

variable was labeled based on Oxford's (1990) suggestion. Thus, the low use of strategy was determined between 1.00 and 2.49, the medium 2.50-3.49, and the high use of strategy is determined as 3.50 and above.

Overall Grammar Learning Strategy Use

Table 1 below depicts the mean, SD and interpretation of the strategies and their sub-scales. It was found that the strategy category that was often used was compensation strategy (M= 3.51, SD= .923) which was labeled as high.

Table 1: Overall Grammar Learning Strategies use

Strategies	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation	Sub-scale	Mean	Std. Dev	Interpretation
Memory	3.29	.547	medium		3.37	.488	Medium
Cognitive	3.31	.509	medium	Direct Strategies			
Compensation	3.51	.923	High				
Metacognitive	3.07	.649	Medium		3.08	.522	Medium
Affective	3.04	.763	Medium	Indirect Strategies			
Social	3.15	.830	Medium				
Total	-	-			3.23	.428	Medium

On the other hand, the participants were found as moderate strategy users in the remaining strategy categories: memory (M=3.29, SD=.547), cognitive (M=3.31, SD=.509), metacognitive (M=3.07, SD=.649), affective (M=3.04, SD=.763), and social strategies (M=3.15, SD=.830), yet among them the participants use of affective strategy was lower as compared with the other strategies.

Additionally, Table 1 shows that the students use both direct grammar learning strategies (M=3.37, SD=.488) and indirect grammar learning strategies (M=3.08, SD=.522) at a medium level. Nonetheless, as the mean values indicate the participants preferred direct strategies a bit higher than the indirect strategies. In general, the total use of grammar learning strategies (M=3.23, SD=.428) shows the participants were moderate users of the overall strategies.

Use of Grammar Learning Strategies by Gender

Table 2 below displays the result of an independent samples t-test for male and female participants in each grammar learning strategy group: what strategy group males and females favored the most and the least.

Among the strategy categories, compensation strategy rated as the most preferred strategy by male (M=3.50, SD=.901) and female (M=3.53, SD=.943) respondents respectively. Whereas, the remaining strategy groups were used by both males and females in average level in spite of rank differences.

Table 2: Preferences of Grammar Learning Strategies use by gender in Rank Order

Strategy	Mean	Std. Dev.	Males		Females			
			Interpretation	Rank	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation	Rank
Memory	3.22	.497	medium	3	3.34	.580	Medium	2
Cognitive	3.35	.481	medium	2	3.28	.529	Medium	3
Compensation	3.50	.901	high	1	3.53	.943	High	1
Metacognitive	3.15	.640	medium	4	3.01	.652	Medium	6
Affective	2.96	.708	medium	6	3.12	.800	Medium	5
Social	3.06	.795	medium	5	3.23	.851	Medium	4

On top of that, metacognitive strategy group was the fourth preferred strategy group by males (M=3.15, SD=.640), whereas females (M=3.01, SD=.652) employed this strategy group as the least. Likewise, the affective strategy was preferred by female participants (M=3.12,

SD=.800) in the fifth place, while male students (M=2.96, SD=.708) ranked it as the least preferred.

Table 3: Preferences of the Direct and Indirect Strategies by gender

Strategy	Males			Females		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
Direct	3.36	.471	1	3.39	.504	1
Indirect	3.05	.471	2	3.11	.559	2
Overall	3.20	.390	-	3.25	.457	-

Table 3 shows that males (M=3.36, SD=.471) and females (M=3.39, SD=.504) preferred the direct strategies more than the indirect strategies though both males (M=3.05, SD=.471) and females (M=3.11, SD=.559) have also moderately preferred the indirect strategies. Generally, both males and females were medium users of the overall grammar learning strategies with almost equal mean value of 3.25 and 3.20 respectively.

Table 4 below shows the result of an independent samples t-test with 95% confidence level for the purpose of investigating differences in strategy use between male and female learners.

Table 4: Independent Samples t-test for the Male and Female Participants' Use of the Six Strategy Categories

Strategy Categories	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Memory	.960	.328	-1.772	262	.078	-.11961
Cognitive	.728	.394	1.141	262	.255	.07195
Compensation	.116	.733	-.275	262	.784	-.03146
Metacognitive	.059	.808	1.712	262	.088	.13723
Affective	1.951	.164	-1.713	262	.088	-.16145
Social	1.006	.317	-1.665	262	.097	-.17063

The results of the t-test displayed in Table 4 show the results of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, the t value, df, and the p value of each of the six strategy groups. As indicated in the table, the sig. value of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances of each of the strategy groups: memory (.328), cognitive (.394), compensation (.733), metacognitive (.808), affective (.164) and social (.317) were greater than .05. Therefore, it can be assumed that the variances were equal.

Additionally, as the result of t-test for Equality of Means indicate, $p > .05$ in each of the strategy categories: memory ($t = -1.772$, $sig = .078$), cognitive ($t = 1.141$, $sig = .255$), compensation ($t = -.275$, $sig = .784$), metacognitive ($t = 1.712$, $sig = .088$), affective ($t = -1.713$, $sig = .088$), and social strategies ($t = -1.665$, $sig = .097$). Thus, it can be concluded that the difference in the use of each of the strategy categories of males and females was not significant.

Moreover, Table 5 below shows the significance levels of direct and indirect grammar learning strategies. Because the sig. value of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances of direct strategies (.773) and the indirect strategies (.102) were greater than .05, the variances were assumed to be equal. Besides, there was no significant difference

between males and females in the use of both direct ($t=-.435$, $\text{sig}=.664$) and indirect ($t=-1.004$, $\text{sig}=.316$) strategies because the p values were greater than .05.

Table 5: Results of the Independent Samples t-test for the Male and Female Participants' Use of Direct and Indirect strategies

Sub-Scales	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Direct	.083	.773	-.435	262	.664	-.02637
Indirect	2.699	.102	-1.004	262	.316	-.06495
Overall	3.180	.076	-.859	262	.391	-.04566

Furthermore, as the result of t-test for Equality of Means for the overall strategy use ($t=-.859$, $p>.05$) indicated a significant difference between males and females in the use of grammar learning strategies was not found.

Discussion

Learners Overall Grammar Learning Strategies Use

The results of the present study indicate that the participants were reported to use direct strategies more than indirect strategies. According to Oxford (1990) direct strategies are more related with mental processing of the target language, while indirect strategies support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language. This implies that probably the participants of the present study did not realize the importance of indirect strategies that are related with their emotions, coordination of the learning process, and the creation of interaction with others to facilitate the successful learning of grammar.

Besides, the possible reason for this finding could be that, the nature of the classroom perhaps gives much emphasis for assignments, quizzes, and examinations. As a result, the learners might give less attention to the indirect strategies. After all, this result is not supported by the previous study findings, which reported that the participants were good at indirect strategies than direct strategies (e.g., Abdi and Dagher, 2010; Aslan, 2009). The possible reason for this contradiction could be the learning environment and, the cultural background of the learners.

Moreover, the participants of the study preferred Compensation strategies the most with the highest average value. This result was consistent with the previous studies (Li, 2005; Tam, 2013) that reported Compensation strategies as the most frequently used strategy category. Contrary to the finding of the present research, Abdi and Dagher's (2010) finding revealed Compensation Strategies as the least frequently used ones.

The fact that Compensation strategies are one of the important means of communication, learners prefer to use the strategies mostly in formal language learning settings to reduce communication breakdowns as a result of inadequate repertoire of grammar and vocabulary. However, the high use of Compensation strategies may reflect the very traditional and didactic nature of these classrooms and thus considered input-poor environments (Bedell and Oxford, 1996; Kourago, 1993 cited in Wahyuni, 2013). Besides, making informed guesses is strongly encouraged because of the exam-oriented nature of the learning environment. If students are not willing to take risks, or will respond only if they are certain their answer is correct, this would likely have a negative impact on their test performance because questions would be left unanswered.

The least favored strategies by the participants in this study were Affective Strategies. This finding is in line with some studies (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006; Ozmen and Gulleroglu, 2013; Tam, 2013; Temesgen, 2013) that reported Affective Strategies as the least

preferred category. Contrary to this result, in Ahmadi and Mahmoodi's (2012) study Affective Strategies were the most used category by the learners. This negative tendency in the use of Affective strategies is perhaps due to the learners' low intension to notice their personal emotions, attitudes, and motivations while studying or learning grammar.

Moreover, because of the conservative nature which is highly prevalent in the society, children are less likely encouraged to discern their actual feelings prior to responding to the feeling of others around them. Hence, students might perform things to please others such as parents or teachers and at the same time the habit of expecting rewards only from external sources probably encroached to students. Similarly, boys might refrain themselves from sensing and sharing their feelings to others in order to avoid being considered as possessing weak personality by the society. On top of that, it seems that the inadequacy of facilities in most of the schools might deter students' opportunity to employ affective strategies. Therefore, students would face a great disadvantage since Affective Strategies have lots of importance to the learners. Oxford (1990: 140) believes that "the affective side of the learner is probably one of the very biggest influences on language learning success or failure."

Grammar Learning Strategy and Gender

Male and female participants differ in their choice of the six groups of grammar learning strategies. However, Compensation strategies were the top-rated strategy category with a high mean value by males and females with no significant difference between them, though females were slightly higher in using the strategy. Similarly, in Green and Oxford's (1995) study, the Compensation strategy category did not show significant variation (cited in Li, 2005). Likewise, in Yalcin's (2006) study on language learning strategies based on gender indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between

males and females in the use of Compensation strategies (cited in Aslan, 2009).

Furthermore, although Memory and Cognitive strategies were used in medium level by males and females without significant difference, Memory strategies were the second most preferred strategy category for females, while this category was the third strategy group for males. Whereas, Cognitive strategies were the second preferred strategies by males, while they were the third for females.

This finding seems to contradict with what Oxford (1990: 40) has stated about the use of Memory strategies by language learners. She reported that regardless of the powerful contribution of Memory strategies to language learning, "some research shows that language learners rarely report using these strategies...especially beyond elementary levels of language learning." Since male and female participants of this study were moderate users of this strategy category.

Similarly, the result is inconsistent with some studies (Ahmadi and Mahmoodi, 2012; Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006; Li, 2005; Rahimi, Riazi and Saif, 2008; Salahshour et al, 2013) that found least frequent use of Memory category by female learners. This inconsistency in the findings may be indicative of the context-specific nature of the strategies. However, as reported in Khamkhien (2010) research, Wen and Wang's (1996) study revealed females' superiority to their male counter parts in the use of Memory strategies was consistent with the finding of the present study. Likewise, the other correspondent research was Ozmen and Gulleroglu's (2013) study, which depicted females' use of Memory strategies more than males.

On the other hand, Oxford's (1990:43) report on Cognitive strategies agrees with the result of the present study. She points out that "Cognitive strategies are typically found to be the most popular strategies with language learners." since the participants of this study use this category in medium level. In congruent with the finding of this

research, Rahimi, Riazi and Saif's (2008) study revealed males superiority to females in the use of Cognitive strategies. But inconsistent with the result of this study, (Ahmadi and Mahmoodi's, 2012) finding revealed that Cognitive strategies were the least applied strategy categories by males and females and in Salahshour et al (2013) study females were reported to use Cognitive strategies more than males.

All in all, a possible reason for the finding of the present study is probably the result of behavioral difference between males and females. That is, males are likely to be more interested in challenge. It means that according to Oxford (1990:43) Cognitive strategies are more of "practical for language learning." Thus, these strategies require learners to solve different problems. So that males prefer to get involved in problem solving, whereas for females the feeling of achievement is the most important aspect. As a result they tend to memorize what they have learnt.

Furthermore, the use of Affective Strategies of male participants was much lower than that of female participants. Even this strategy category was the least to be preferred by males. This finding parallels findings from studies by (Aslan, 2009; Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006; Wahyuni, 2013; Zeynali, 2012) in which the findings revealed males use of Affective strategies the least among the other strategy categories and indicated females superiority in this group.

Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) argue that women tend to build relationships and use social network with greater consistency than men. Consequently, the use of Affective strategies indicating the use of emotional support systems in the context of language learning is not unexpected. Likewise, Oxford (1993) cited in (Zeynali, 2012) believes, female learners tend to pay more attention to their feelings more than males. That is why males were less interested to use Affective strategies. This could be true for the context of this study too. Nevertheless, this finding is inconsistent with a study (Ahmadi and

Mahmoodi, 2012) that found Affective strategies to be among the most used strategy categories.

Moreover, Social strategies were the second strategy category with the lowest mean value as preferred by males and the average score indicates females' superiority in this domain. This finding is compatible with (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006; Tam, 2013; (Green and Oxford, 1995 as cited in Tam, 2013); Zeynali, 2012) in which female learners tend to use Social strategies more than male learners. However, the findings of the present study is incongruent with the result of Radwan's (2011) research, which reported males use of Social strategies more than females because of the cultural background of the students.

The reason which accounts for the reluctance of male participants to make cooperation with others may be related to the gender-related behavior difference. Tannen (1990) (cited in Tam, 2013) indicates that males value status and independence more, whereas females value connection, cooperation, and intimacy more. Seeking help from others, which is a sign of showing a sense of inferiority, hampers male participants' interest in cooperating with others in the learning process.

At last, Metacognitive strategies were the least to be selected by females. This results somewhat agrees with what Oxford (1990:137) states about Metacognitive strategies. She pointed out that "though Metacognitive strategies are extremely important; research shows that learners use these strategies sporadically and without much sense of their importance." In contrary to the finding of this research, some studies (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006; Rahimi, Riazi and Saif, 2008; Salahshour et al., 2013) reported that females' use of Metacognitive strategies more than the other strategy categories. The reason for the result of the present research is perhaps due to female learners' unawareness of the power of Metacognitive strategies in the learning process of grammar.

As is evident in Table 2, the mean scores of the overall strategy use were almost similar for male and female participants. Gender differences, therefore, turned out to have no significant effect ($p = .39$) on participants overall use of grammar learning strategies, though female participants were reported to have slight superiority to males in four strategy categories (Memory, Compensation, Affective, and Social).

The findings of the relationship between gender and the overall strategy use in the present study is consistent with former studies (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006; Li, 2005; Nisbet, Tindall and Arroyo, 2005; Radwan, 2011; Rahimi, Riazi and Saif, 2008; Wahyuni, 2013), which have reported no significant difference between males and females in the use of overall learning strategies though there were significant differences in particular strategy categories and in the pattern of strategy category preferences between the two groups.

A possible explanation for this absence of gender effect in the present study might be the fact that the participants of this study were enrolled in a similar learning environment. Therefore, it is possible that the participants' awareness of grammar learning process minimized the gender effect in this study.

Conclusion

The results of the study highlight that the strategies that are most used by the participants in this study were Compensation Strategies. However, the least used strategy discovered was Affective strategies. Additionally, the learners are more of direct strategy users than indirect strategies. These results of the research show that the context of grammar learning such as the teaching approach adopted in the classroom and the grammar tasks to be completed seems played an important role in the learners' strategy preferences.

In terms of males and females' preferences of strategies, both male and female learners favored Compensation strategies in the highest level. However, Affective strategies were the least preferred strategy group by males, while females favored Metacognitive strategies less than the other strategy groups. Consequently, it seems that awareness of strategy use and psychological traits might be the major factors for their strategy choices. The study also revealed that there was no significant difference between males and females using grammar learning strategies. In general, the learners perhaps enrolled in a traditional way of learning process than the communicative one that give much attention to facilitate practical grammar learning for real life situation.

Recommendations

The study indicated that learners are using different learning strategies in the process of language learning however there are differences observed in the strategies being used. Thus, in order to assist language learners especially those who suffer from social-cultural discrimination, language teaching, and learning programs have to include learning strategies awareness and training sessions. What is more, language teachers have to customize their lesson presentations, so that students can practice different learning strategies. Material writers and classroom teachers should also emphasize the importance of providing adequate opportunities for students to engage actively in the learning sessions by providing chances to practice both direct and indirect learning strategies. Both male and female students should be encouraged to take a risk in using all sorts of strategies as a means to learn the language rather than using only compensation strategies which are being used to handle deficiencies.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study assessed preparatory school learners' use of grammar learning strategies and its relationship with gender, yet certain gaps, which require further investigation, were found.

- The current investigation measured learning strategy preferences using one self-report instrument (i.e. GLSQ) at a particular point in time. Continued studies can incorporate a variety of measures such as think-aloud protocols concurrent with a specific learning task, observations, and structured interviews.
- Further studies might be carried out to determine factors which were beyond the scope of the present research such as, language teaching methods, language learning goals, testing methods, and new computer-assisted language learning technologies.
- Further research is needed to more fully explore this area and the nature of the relationship between grammar learning strategies and other variables such as achievement, age, motivation and anxiety of grammar learning.

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