



## THE EFFECT OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES ON ACADEMIC ACHIVEMENT

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to find out the relationship between learning strategies and academic achievement and determine how much learning strategies predict the achievement. In this study learning strategies were treated as independent variables whereas achievement was treated as dependent variable. Population of the study consists of 733 students (N = 733) attending at a vocational college in İzmir in 2014-2015 academic year. Sampling group consists of 267 students. In this study, Language Learning Strategies Scale was used to gather information. The results of the study showed that there is a positive and meaningful relationship between learning strategies and achievement. Also, learning strategies can predict about 20% of achievement.

**Keywords:** Language Learning Strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies.

### INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is a difficult process in which individual differences become very important. Success in learning the language may differ according to the age, gender, goal of the learning, level of the motivation, using the learning strategies and level of the anxiety. Though the first studies about the language learning concentrated on the class-centered teaching methods, individual factors like different learning environment outside the classroom, motivation, the anxiety about the learning, the strategies used in the learning process were ignored. This process continued until the late 70s. After then, the main concern of the language learning studies has become the individual differences instead of the teaching methods (White, 2008).

Individual differences become very important in learning a language except the mother language. In terms of using and acquiring the mother language everybody follows similar procedures and reaches a specific competence level. However, it is not possible to mention the similar process in learning a foreign language for everybody. The reason of that situation is the individual differences (Benson & Gao, 2008).

### Language Learning Strategies

In language learning process, using learning strategies is not an individual difference, but preference of the strategies is a distinctive characteristic (Benson & Gao, 2008). Learning strategies are the steps that the

learners take to enrich their learning. Learning strategies are very important in learning a language, because they provide self-directed active participation into the process that is essential in developing communicative competence. Learning strategies that are used properly develops the competence and self-confidence.

Strategy derives from the Greek word “strategia” that means the war art. Generally, strategy is a method, plan and step to achieve an aim. Learning strategies are the specific actions that are used to obtain, store and recall the information when it’s needed (Oxford, 1990). According to Cohen (1998) language learning strategies are the conscious steps that the students take in learning and using a language. The students prefer specific actions and steps to learn the target language or to facilitate the tasks about the learned language. In order to have such a preference, they need to know themselves and their needs, be aware of the learning process and the goals, and be self controlled and independent individuals (White, 2008).

According to the definitions given above, we can express some basic features of learning strategies as follows:

- The main objective of using learning strategies is to contribute to the communicative competence.
- They help students to become more self directed and self controlled individuals.
- They expand the teachers’ roles.
- Learning strategies are problem-oriented.
- They are special actions.
- Learning strategies covers not only the cognitive but also the other aspects of the students.
- They contribute to the students both directly and indirectly.
- Learning strategies are mostly used deliberately, cannot be always observed, be thought and there are many factors that influence their use (Oxford, 1990).

There are many classification of learning strategies. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) classify the learning strategies into three groups: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social-affective strategies. The strategies like planning the learning process, concentrating on a specific topic, self management, self-monitoring and self evaluation are the metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies include mental procedures that learners go through in learning and using the target language. Identification, grouping, retention, storage and retrieval of language material, rehearsal, using prior knowledge to understand new language material, using details, summarizing are the example of cognitive strategies. Social strategies are the learners’ preference to interact with others such as asking questions for an explanation or verification and cooperating with others to complete language tasks. Affective strategies help students to regulate their emotions, motivations and attitudes. They are often used to reduce anxiety and provide self encouragement.

Oxford (1990) divides the learning strategies into two main groups: direct and indirect strategies. (see Table 1). Direct strategies that directly involve the target language consist of memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. Memory strategies such as grouping or using imagery help students store and retrieve information. Cognitive strategies enable learners to understand and produce the new language. Compensation strategies like guessing and using synonyms allow learners to use the language despite their gaps in knowledge. Indirect strategies that consist of metacognitive, affective and social strategies support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language. Metacognitive strategies help the learners coordinate their own learning process. Affective strategies are used to control emotions, motivations and attitudes. Social strategies help learners learn through interaction with others.

In language learning, there are many factors that influence the students’ use and selection of strategies. According to the studies, there is a strong correlation between the strategy use and motivation. Female students use more strategies than the male students and successful students use more strategies than the unsuccessful ones (Chang, 2005; Green & Oxford, 1995; Macaro, 2001). Also, social and cultural environment in which the learner grew up influences the strategy use and selection (Benson & Gao, 2008; Deneme, 2008; Macaro, 2001).

Table 1: Language Learning Strategies

	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Direct Strategies	Memory Strategies	Creating mental linkages Applying images and sounds Reviewing well Employing action
	Cognitive Strategies	Practicing Receiving and sending messages Analyzing and reasoning
	Compensation Strategies	Guessing Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing
Indirect Strategies	Metacognitive Strategies	Centering your learning Arranging and planning your learning Evaluating your learning
	Affective Strategies	Lowering your anxiety Encouraging yourself Taking your emotional temperature
	Social Strategies	Asking questions Cooperating with others Empathizing with others

## METHOD

### Design

This study explains how much learning strategies predicts the academic achievement. In order to analyze the relationship between learning strategies and the academic achievement, a correlational design was used. Correlational design is used to determine the relationship between variables, if a relationship exists, to determine a regression equation that could be used to make predictions (Christensen, Jhonson & Turner, 2011).

### Population and Sampling

Population of the study consists of 733 students (N = 733) attending at a vocational college in İzmir in 2014-2015 academic year. Sampling group consisting of 267 ( 1st class=165 and 2nd class=102) was determined randomly. Descriptive statistics of participants are given at Table 2.

Table 2: Participants Descriptive Statistics

<b>Options</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Total</b>
Class		1st Class	2nd Class	
	<i>n</i>	165	102	267
	%	61.8	38.2	100
Language Course		A1	A2	
	<i>n</i>	183	84	267
	%	68.5	31.5	100

### Instruments

In this study, Language Learning Strategies Scale and students' midterm exam results were used to gather data.

### Language Learning Strategies Scale

Language Learning Strategies Scale (Oxford, 1990) which has been well validated and widely used in the language learning literature was translated into Turkish by the researcher. The Scale is a 5-point Likert type strategy scale with 55 items. It consists of six dimensions, namely; (i) memory, (ii) cognitive strategies, (iii) compensation strategies, (iv) metacognitive strategies, (v) affective strategies and (vi) social strategies. Its structural validity was analyzed via main component analysis and factor loads varied between .63 and .84. The Cronbach Alpha internal validity coefficients of the six dimensions varied between .79 and .86 .

### FINDINGS

#### Correlations

Correlation coefficient is a numerical index ranging from -1.00 to + 1.00 that indicates the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables. The absolute size of the number indicates the strength of the correlation and the sign (positive or negative) indicates the direction of the relationship. (Christensen, Jhonson & Turner, 2011)

Table 3: Language Learning Strategies and Achievement Pearson Correlation Matrix

Language Learning Strategies	Academic Achievement	P
Memory	.463**	.000
Cognitive	.092	.132
Compensation	.022	.719
Metacognitive	.220**	.000
Affective	.144*	.019
Social	.120*	.020
Total	.442**	.000

*n* =267, \**p*<.05, \*\* *p*<.01

According to the table, there is a positive and meaningful relationship between memory strategies ( $r=0.463$  and  $p<.01$ ), metacognitive strategies ( $r=0.220$  and  $p<.01$ ), affective strategies ( $r=0.144$  and  $p<.05$ ), social strategies ( $r=0.120$  and  $p<.05$ ) and academic achievement. The relationship between cognitive strategies, compensation strategies and academic achievement is positive but not meaningful. As a whole, there is a positive and meaningful relationship between strategy use and academic achievement ( $r=0.442$  and  $p<.01$ )

#### Regression

Regression analysis is a set of statistical procedures used to explain or predict the values of a dependent variable based on the values of one or more independent or predictor variables. (Christensen, Jhonson & Turner, 2011).

Table 4: Regression Analysis for Language Learning Strategies and Academic Achievement

Academic Achievement	B	SHB	$\beta$	t	p
Constant	.110	.390		.283	.777
Learning Strategies	.028	.004	.442	8.016	.000

*n*=267, *R*=.442, *R*<sup>2</sup>=.195, *F*=64.249, *p*<.05

Table 4 shows how much language learning strategies can predict achievement. As seen at the table, using language learning strategies can predict the %20 of the achievement in a positive and significant manner [ $R=.442$ ,  $R^2=.195$ ,  $F=64.249$ ,  $p<.05$ ] and, %80 of the achievement can be explained by other variables.

Table 5: Regression Analysis for Different Language Learning Strategies and Academic Achievement

<i>Academic Achievement</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SHB</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>P</i>
Constant	-.078	.552		-.142	.887
1–Memory	.128	.017	.431	7.359	.000
2–Social	.076	.046	.094	1.656	.099
3–Compensation	-.020	.033	-.034	-.593	.553
4–Metacognitive	.032	.029	.066	1.128	.261
5–Affective	.026	.038	.039	.690	.491
6–Cognitive	.024	.035	.046	.570	.372

*n*=267, *R*=.479, *R*<sup>2</sup>=.229, *F*=15.514, *p*<.05

Table 5 shows how much different language learning strategies can predict achievement. As seen at the table, memory strategies can predict the %23 of the achievement in a positive and significant manner [*R*=.479, *R*<sup>2</sup>=.229, *F*=15.514, *p*<.05] and %77 of the achievement can be explained by other variables.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research was designed to find out the relationship between learning strategies and academic achievement and determine how much learning strategies can predict the academic achievement. Learning a foreign language includes some difficulties and individual differences can be very important in this process. Learners may encounter some difficulties in learning a foreign language that they don't experience while learning the native language. Though using learning strategies isn't a direct individual difference, different learners use different strategies.

Findings in this research reveal that there is a positive and meaningful relationship between memory strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, social strategies, and academic achievement (*r*= .12 - .46). The relationship between cognitive strategies, compensation strategies and academic achievement is positive but not meaningful. As a whole, there is a positive and meaningful relationship between strategy use and academic achievement (*r*=0.442 and *p*<.01)

Regression analysis shows that using language learning strategies can predict the %20 of the achievement in a positive and significant manner. Memory strategies as a learning strategies variable can predict the academic achievement 23% by itself. Since there is a positive and significant relationship between memory strategies and achievement, learners who use memory strategies can be more successful.

Findings in this research about the relationship between language learning strategies and the academic achievement are consistent with the results in literature (e.g. Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Shmais, 2003; Macaro, 2001). If instructors introduce and reinforce strategy use in language learning process, the learners may improve their performance, be aware of the learning process and the goals, and be self controlled and independent individuals.

**WJEIS's Note:** This article was presented at 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on New Trends in Education - ICONTE, 13- 15 May, 2016, Antalya-Turkey and was selected for publication for Volume 7 Number 3 of IJONTE 2016 by IJONTE Scientific Committee.



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