

Language Strategies Deployed by the Learners of English Major Undergraduates: An Exploration of its Status

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Abstract:

In the first changing world of technology, communication takes a new shape every time. For this reason, bringing change to teaching effective communication is almost a herculean task for language trainers, especially for those who teach English as a second language. However, while exposed to the various learning activities, the learners of English deploy some strategies to learn English on their part. These strategies are unknown to them and therefore remain unstructured for teachers and students alike. The results showed that cognitive strategy among the direct and metacognitive strategy among the indirect is used most. Furthermore, females were reported deploying strategies more than their male counterparts with a statistical significance ($p < 0.05$). Finally, the correlation between direct and indirect strategies was reported as moderately positive but significant ($p < 0.01$).

Keywords: Language Strategies, Direct Strategies, Indirect Strategies, English Major

I. Introduction

The process of describing the learning of a second language is considered labyrinthine. However, researchers have already focused on this phenomenon and started describing it in multifarious ways. For the successful execution of any work, a prior plan of action is needed. In the same way, learning a second language also demands some sort of smart maneuvering on the part of the learner. In the case of learning English as a second language, deploying strategies is considered smart maneuvering for the successful learning of the language. The use of strategies comprises a huge spectrum of different activities like enhancing vocabulary, recalling information, guessing, social transactions etc. Earlier, research in this field showed that second language learners use strategies during their learning to influence their encoding process (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986). In this context, most of the students pursuing the English major program in the colleges of West Bengal generally come from Bengali or English medium schools, having English as a second language. Since these strategies are not well formed and spread to the learners, this paper attempts to bring forth the use of strategies deployed by the undergraduate students of English major programs by eliciting responses from them on a five-point Likert scale with fifty statements. The strategies for language learning, according to Rebeca Oxford, are memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social. The memory strategy means a learner uses mental linkages, applying images and sounds. The cognitive strategy stands for practising and creating a structure for input and output. The compensation strategy denotes guessing intelligently and overcoming problems in speaking and writing.

These three strategies are together called direct strategies. On the other hand, the metacognitive strategy means centring one's learning and evaluating that learning. The affective strategy stands for lowering one's anxiety and encouraging oneself. Finally, the social strategy means asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others. Together these three strategies are called indirect strategies. Even many teachers or professors of English are not aware of these strategies. For this, this paper attempts to bring to the fore the use of strategies and the type of strategies most preferred by the students of English undergraduates.

The following objectives have been formulated to serve the purpose of this paper.

Objectives:

1. To find out the most used strategy among the direct strategies.
2. To find out the most used strategy among the indirect strategies.
3. To compare the use of direct strategies under the categorical variable gender.
4. To compare the use of indirect strategies under the categorical variable gender.
5. To study the nature of the relationship between direct and indirect strategies.

Research Question & Hypothesis:

RQ1: What is the most used strategy among the direct strategies?

RQ2: What is the most used strategy among the indirect strategies?

H₀₁: There exists no significant mean difference between male and female English major students in the use of direct strategies at the U.G. level.

H₀₂: There exists no significant mean difference between male and female English major students in the use of indirect strategies at the U.G. level.

H₀₃: There is no significant correlation between direct and indirect strategies.

Delimitation of the Study:

This study is delimited to the undergraduate students of the English major program. Moreover, this study is also delimited to the colleges located in the districts of Birbhum, East Burdwan, West Burdwan, Hooghly, Howrah, Kolkata, and South 24 Parganas in the state of West Bengal.

II. Literature Review

Green and Oxford (1995) in their study reported that strategies were highly used by successful language learners (Intermediate and Basic) and higher levels of strategies were used more by women than men. Females were reported using memory, metacognitive, social and affective strategies more frequently than males. This was even significant at 0.05 level. **Aliakbari, M., & Hayatzadeh, A. (2008)** reported that the highest strategy used by Iranian learners was the metacognitive strategy and the least used strategy was the memory strategy. Besides, the cognitive strategy was correlated with other strategies. The male learners deployed the strategy more than the females. **Lai (2009)** in his study investigated the underlying relationship between strategy use and the patterns of strategy use as per the language proficiency level. The results reported that the learners used the compensation strategy most frequently and the affective strategy least frequently. Moreover, the proficiency level had a significant effect on strategy choice and use. The most proficient learners used cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The least proficient learners used memory and social strategies. **Aslan, O (2009)** found that language learning strategies are positively effective in learning English successfully. Females were reported to use more strategies than males. **Radwan, A. A. (2011)** reported that students used metacognitive strategies the most and memory strategy the least. In addition, males used significantly more social strategy than females in the study. **Zeynali, S.**

(2012) found that in the case of social and affective strategies, females’ mean scores were significantly higher than those of the males in this research. **Doró, K., & Habók, A. (2013)** in their study revealed that the metacognitive strategy was used most and the compensation the least. Females, however, used more strategies than males. **Nelson, Devardhi and Berhanu (2014)** found that females were more successful users of strategies than their male counterparts at the tertiary level in learning English. **Alhaysony (2017)** found that cognitive, metacognitive and compensation strategies were used most frequently and females used them more than males.

III. Methodology of the Study:

At first, Rebecca Oxford’s Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was selected for conducting this research. Then the tool with fifty items was kept and not a single item was reworded. The participants were English Major undergrads of different years from seven districts of West Bengal. A total number of 171 (for male N=69, for female N=102) participants took part in this survey. Therefore, this study comes within the purview of descriptive survey research following simple random sampling. The reliability of the Inventory was found to be .86 using Cronbach Alpha, which is high. First, the collected raw data were tabulated on MS Excel 2021 and final data analysis was performed on IBM SPSS Version 26.0. Since the data collected met the assumptions of the parametric test, an independent sample ‘t’ test was employed for inferential statistics. Apart from this, the mean, and standard deviation were used for descriptive statistics.

IV. Results and Discussions:

Table No: 1 Descriptive Statistics for mean score comparison among direct Strategies

Report_ Direct Strategies			
	Memory	Cognitive	Comp
Mean	33.30	55.10	21.75
N	171	171	171
Std. Deviation	4.04	5.32	2.98

The above-given table shows that the mean scores of Memory strategy (M=33.30, SD=4.04), Cognitive Strategy (M=55.10, SD=5.32) and Compensation Strategy (M=21.75, SD=2.98) do vary a lot from each other. Here the Cognitive Strategy (M=55.10, SD=5.32) is reported to be widely deployed.

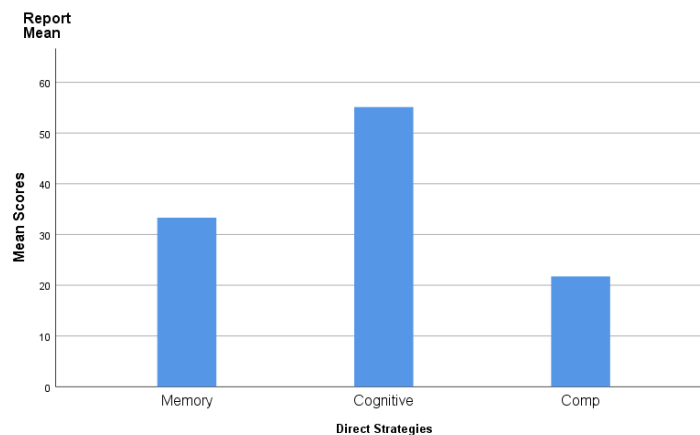


Figure 1: Bar diagram_ Direct Strategies

Table No: 2 Descriptive Statistics for mean score comparison among indirect Strategies

Report_ Indirect Strategies			
	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mean	37.75	22.08	23.91
N	171	171	171
Std. Deviation	4.14	3.62	3.28

The above-given table shows that the mean scores of Metacognitive strategy (M=37.75, SD=4.14), Affective Strategy (M=22.08, SD=3.62) and Social Strategy (M=23.91, SD=3.28) do vary a lot from each other. Here the Metacognitive Strategy (M=37.75, SD=4.14) is reported to be widely deployed.

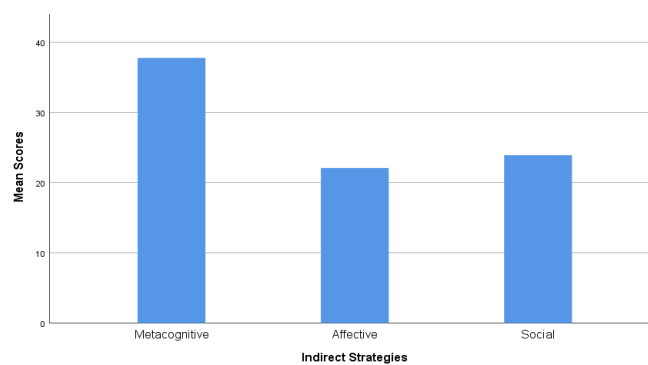


Figure 2: Bar diagram_ Indirect Strategies

Table No: 3 Descriptive Statistics_ direct strategies_ gender

Group Statistics				
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Direct Strategies	male	69	108.22	10.94
	female	102	111.47	8.74

The table above shows the mean scores of male and female English Undergraduates concerning direct strategies. There are very slight differences between male (M=108.22, SD=10.94, N=69) and female (M=111.47, SD=8.74, N=102) undergraduates in their usage of direct strategies. An independent sample ‘t’ test was administered to check the statistical significance of the existing mean difference between the two groups.

Table No: 3.1 Independent sample ‘t’ test between male and female students for direct strategies

		Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Direct Strategies	Equal variances assumed	2.652	.105	-2.154	169	.033	-3.25

In the table given above Levene’s test for equality of variance was employed to check whether there existed equal variances between the mean scores of male and female undergraduates about their deployment of direct strategies. The calculated F value for Levene’s test was 2.652 and the p-value was .105 ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the assumption of equal variance was kept and an independent sample ‘t’ test was later administered to check the equality of means. In the above table, the calculated ‘t’₍₁₆₉₎ value was -2.154 and the p-value was .033 ($p < 0.05$). Hence, the null hypothesis H_01 is rejected.

Table No:4 Descriptive Statistics_ indirect strategies_ gender

Group Statistics				
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Indirect Strategies	male	69	81.04	9.73
	female	102	85.56	7.37

The table above shows the mean scores of male and female English Undergraduates concerning indirect strategies. There are very slight differences between male (M=81.04, SD=9.73, N=69) and female (M=85.56, SD=7.37, N=102) undergraduates in their usage of direct strategies. An independent sample ‘t’ test was administered to check the statistical significance of the existing mean difference between the two groups.

Table No: 4.1 Independent sample ‘t’ test between male and female students for indirect strategies

		Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Indirect Strategies	Equal variances not assumed	7.322	.008	-3.27	118.961	.001	-4.51

In the table shown above, the calculated F value for Levene’s test was 7.322 and the p-value was .008 ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the assumption of equal variance failed. Later, an independent sample ‘t’ test with adjusted df assuming unequal variances was administered to check the equality of means. In the above table, the calculated ‘t’_(118.961) value was -3.27 and the p-value was .001 ($p < 0.05$). Hence, the null hypothesis H_02 is rejected.

Table No: 5 Pearson Correlation between Direct and Indirect Strategies

Correlations			
		Direct Strategies	Indirect Strategies
Direct Strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	.541**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	171	171
Indirect Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.541**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

	N	171	171
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

As per the above-given table, the correlation between direct and indirect strategies is $r = .541$. This correlation is moderately positive and significant at 0.01 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis H_03 is rejected.

V. Major Findings

1. Among the direct strategies, cognitive strategy ($M=55.10$) is reported to be the most deployed strategy of all (**RQ 1**). Memory ($M=33.30$) stands out as English Undergraduates' second most preferred strategy. Finally, the compensation strategy ($M=21.75$) remains the least preferred. This finding is consistent with **Lai (2009) & Alhaysony (2017)**.
2. In the case of indirect strategies, the metacognitive strategy ($M=37.75$) emerges as the most preferred strategy of all (**RQ 2**). On the other hand, the social strategy ($M=23.91$) remains the second-preferred strategy. Finally, the affective strategy (22.08) emerges as the least preferred strategy among the indirect ones. This finding is consistent with **Green and Oxford (1995), Aliakbari, M., & Hayatzadeh, A. (2008), Lai (2009), Radwan, A. A. (2011), Doró, K., & Habók, A. (2013), Alhaysony (2017)**.
3. Regarding the deployment of direct strategies in learning the English language, female ones ($M=111.47$) use them much more than their male counterparts ($M=108.22$). This phenomenon is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the formulated **H₀₁** is rejected. This finding is consistent with **Aslan, O (2009), Nelson, Devardhi and Berhanu (2014)**.
4. The next finding indicates that female undergrads ($M=85.56$) also use indirect strategies much more than male undergrads ($M=81.04$). This is even statistically significant at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$). For this reason, the formulated **H₀₂** is rejected. This finding is consistent with **Green and Oxford (1995), Aliakbari, M., & Hayatzadeh, A. (2008), Zeynali, S. (2012), Doró, K., & Habók, A. (2013), Alhaysony (2017)**.
5. Finally, the relationship between direct and indirect strategies is positive and significant. There exists a positive medium correlation with each other. This also means that if the use of direct strategies increases, the use of indirect strategies will also accrue. The vice-versa also holds true in this case. That is why **H₀₃** is rejected.

VI. Conclusion

However, the overall research signifies that the users of strategies for learning English deploy them in their confrontation with any literary piece or language work in their daily activities. What surprises us is that they are unaware of these strategies. What it needs is a structured stimulation from outside to activate it. They use it without knowing its existence. Here the teachers and professors of English apart from teaching literary pieces prescribed in the syllabi should focus on psycholinguistics factors responsible for learning a second language. This can be possible if there is sufficient exposure to this knowledge for the teachers and professors of English. They need a sufficient number of teachers' training programs and human resource development centres in universities where teacher educators can illuminate them with the standard operating procedure.

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