



## **Adult Learning Strategies in an Onsite Training Program in Tunisia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The new market place has dictated on adults the use of English as it is the first international language used in business. However, learning a foreign language becomes more and more complicated as the learner gets older, is in a mature command of L1 and L2, and does not have enough time to learn due to professional responsibilities. Contrary to children who acquire a language thanks to an immature prefrontal cortex, adults who are experienced, and lead complex lives rely on their L1 or L2, and their educational experience to learn a foreign language by using some strategies. This study explored the learning strategies employed by two groups of executives belonging to two different business areas in Tunisia. The instrument used to gather the data of 60 adult EFL learners was Oxford's version 7 (1989) of the 50-item Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The data were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics, t-test, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to find out whether any significant effect existed between age, gender, job field, and job position among the respondents in the use of language learning strategies. The results showed that mainly gender and job field impacted the selection of the language learning strategies. Recommendations to design English curriculum for adult learners are provided.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this study was to explore foreign language learning at an adult age. The interest in this topic emanated from a personal experience, as I worked as an onsite business English trainer with different clients of the Tunisian American Chamber of Commerce (TACC). The role of my employer is to help its members enhance their communicative skills in English as this language has become very important in business communication. The levels of the English courses range from beginner to advanced which are delivered by both native and non-native English teachers.

All over the training I have noticed the trainees' enthusiasm to be fluent in English despite a heavy workload and stressful professional life. All of these adults learned English as an obligatory module at the university but when they started their professional life, they found that the level they acquired during their education did not meet their expectations, and they often felt frustrated especially when they were conversing with a native speaker either face to face or on the phone about a work task.

The trainees' educational experience as well as the concern about their learning made them question every new linguistic element they came across during the training. Although this behavior often hindered the smooth flow of the lesson, it, nonetheless, uncovered the

trainees' use of strategies to learn. Being aware of these strategies would facilitate the task of the trainers at the TACC, including myself, and help in the design of customized courses.

As opposed to children who acquire a second or a foreign language due to an immature grasp of L1, adults have a full developed prefrontal cortex and the necessary cognitive capacity to use L1 to help in the learning of an L2 or a foreign language (Smith, 2009). Being unable to acquire an L2 or an FL as easily as children, adult language learners make use of a number of strategies to assess their learning (Williams & Burden, 1997). Cohen (1998) suggests that learners use strategies in different ways depending on their individual preferences, their personalities, the task, and a number of other factors.

Much research has reported a close association between language learning strategy use and other factors including age (Oxford & Erhman, 1995; Sadeghi and Attar 2012; Khezrlou 2012; Aydođan & Akbarov, 2014), gender ( Khalil, 2005; Khamkhien, 2010 ; Chang, 2011; Božinovic, 2011), proficiency level ( O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1999), motivation (Khamkhien, 2010 ; Chang, 2011), academic self-concept (Liu & Chang, 2013), major (Ghing-Yi, Shu-Chen, Yi-Nian, 2007; Chang, 2011; Bani Abderrahman, 2014), and previous target language experience (Khamkhien, 2010 ; Chang, 2011). Bridging the gap between academic instruction and professional training, the present study was designed to explore the effect of age, gender, job field, and job position on the selection of language learning strategies. Results from the current study will provide suggestions for effective language training and guidance to assist adult learners in their quest for autonomous learning.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This section provides a description of English education and training in Tunisia. Then, a definition of language learning strategies is presented, which is followed by a review of studies which have investigated the effect of different learners' characteristics on the use of language learning strategies in studying a foreign language.

### **English education and training in Tunisia**

As opposed to French, which is the second language in Tunisia taught from the second year in the primary school, English used to be taught in secondary school from the fourth to the seventh year, the last year in secondary education. A restructuring of the educational system led to another system known as the basic education from the first year of primary education till the ninth year, and secondary education, from the first year in secondary school to the fourth year, previously known as the seventh year, and the last year in secondary education. Being aware of the importance of English as well as the importance of learning it at an early age, the Tunisian educational policy makers shifted the instruction of English to the seventh form of basic education since 2000. Then starting from 2005 English has been taught at primary schools from the sixth year (Bahloul & Bahloul, 2001). In private schools, however, English is taught from the first grade.

At the university level English is taught either as a major subject for language and art students or as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for institutions of science, engineering and business. However, In comparison to French which has remained the main language of instruction for different university specialties, English has been gradually introduced in higher education institutions of different fields. In the 1980s, only 54% of higher education institutions in Tunisia provided English courses (Hemissi, 1985). By the 1990s, more than fifty science, business and engineering departments taught English. Finally the 1998 Reform generalized the teaching of English at the undergraduate level in all higher education

institutions (Harrabi, 2010). However, a general impression shows that ESP did not often meet the expectations of the students in the different fields (Harrabi, 2010).

In fact, ESP teachers, often having some lack of knowledge about their students' field of specialty, in most cases, have used commercial materials as the development of in-house materials has often been reported to be time-consuming (Harrabi, 2011). Sometimes feeling that the curriculum did not meet their actual needs, university students dropped out of the English course. Such an attitude is often detrimental to the level of English these students graduate with. As a result, the ESP situation in Tunisia has remained unsolvable as pointed out by Seymour (1994 in Harrabi, 2010) who says:

In Tunisia there are often no clear purposes for the study of English. The English taught is for General Purposes, but is called ESP whenever the students are not Language or Arts specialists. (p. 17)

In the workplace, however, English has been recognized as one of the most important languages of business communication. Newly-graduates or even senior level employees expressed the need to get trained in this language. To fill such a gap, the Tunisian government encouraged the companies who accepted to train their employees in English to be refunded. As a consequence the National Center for Continuous Training and Vocational Promotion (le Centre National de la Formation Continue et de la Promotion Professionnelle –CNFCPP<sup>1</sup>) established a background of lifelong learning in all activities required in the workplace including English. The objectives of the CNFCPP include:

- assisting the economic enterprises in the elaboration and the realization of their training plans,
- developing the culture of continuous training for individuals and enterprises
- managing the programs and the financing tools of the continuous training,
- promoting career development through the improvement of the competence level of staff in office in the various economic sectors, and
- developing partnership with organizations and associations in the field of continuous training.

The CNFCPP encourages enterprises to train their personnel through a rebate on the vocational training tax. Thanks to these incentives, several companies now train their employees in English as in the long run it will be less costly than recruiting a translator, and also to empower the employees. To this end, several organizations including the British council, AMIDEAST, the Tunisian American Chamber of Commerce (TACC), etc have been competing to offer English training for employees. <sup>1</sup>

### **Adult learning strategies**

Research has often indicated that children can learn their first language or any other language naturally and effortlessly (Brown, 2000, p.49). This is thanks to the yet not fully-developed cortex which allows for language acquisition (Mast et al, 2009). Contrarily, adults do not reach the same fluency as children in a second or a foreign language (L2/FL). Attempts to explain the discrepancy between children's and adults' acquisition of a target language led to the development of the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) (Lenneberg, 1967 in Snow & Hoefnagel-Hoihle, 1978; Brown, 2000). This hypothesis states that language acquisition should take place during a critical period which should end around the age of puberty with the completion of the development of cerebral lateralization. With some few exceptions, any

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.emploi.gov.tn/fr/le-ministere/etablisements-sous-tutelle/>

language learning which occurs after the age of puberty will be slower and less successful than before the critical period (Snow & Hoefnagel-Hoihle, 1978). Similarly, Krashen (1982) suggested the acquisition-learning distinction to explain the difference between children's and adults' target language proficiency. In fact, acquisition is a subconscious process that takes place in the target language setting. Acquirers of a new language are generally not aware of the language they have acquired. They are

only aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication... [they] are generally not consciously aware of the rules of the languages [they] have acquired. Instead, [they] have a "feel" for correctness. Grammatical sentences "sound" right, or "feel" right, and errors feel wrong, even if [they] do not consciously know what rule was violated (p.10).

Though the lack of elasticity of the brain, as well as its lateralization, has often made it difficult for adults to learn a second or a foreign language with the same ease as children do, something else has aided adults to meet such a gap. In fact, adult learners have greater cognitive and linguistic capabilities and conceptual complexity than younger learners (Slobin, 1993, p. 243). Due to this, research has shown, as reported by Slobin (1993), that adults develop strategies to learn a second or a foreign language.

As defined by Brown (2000), strategies "are those specific 'attacks' that we make on a given problem. They are the moment by moment techniques that we make to solve 'problems' posed by second language input and output" (p. 122). Earlier Oxford (1999), one of the most prominent figures in developing the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) scale referred to strategy as "a conscious movement towards a goal" (p. 110) where the learner's primary goal is to carry out learning tasks, and the final goal is to be proficient in the target language and be able to use it outside the classroom setting. As advanced by Oxford (1999), these strategies help learners gain autonomy in their learning of the target language.

Oxford's (1989) SILL presents six sub-categories that can be labeled as direct and indirect. The direct strategies involve: cognitive, memory, and compensation strategies, while the indirect strategies include: metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The functions of these strategies are presented as follows:

1. Cognitive strategies: enable the language learner to process information directly through reasoning, analyzing, note taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, and practicing.
2. Memory strategies make it possible for the language learner to learn via making connections between one L2 item or concept with.
3. Compensation strategies help the learner make up for knowledge gaps, through guessing, gesturing, etc.
4. Metacognitive strategies which involve identifying one's learning style, planning, collecting and organizing resources, evaluating one's learning are used to manage the learning process.
5. Affective strategies such as identifying one's mood and anxiety level, talking about feelings, rewarding oneself for good performance, and using deep breathing or positive self talk have been shown to demonstrate language proficiency.
6. Social strategies: help the learner work with others and understand the target culture as well as the language. Examples of such strategies include asking for cooperation, working with peers, etc. (Oxford, 1999, p. 12, 13, 14).

Oxford's SILL (1989) has been considered as the most comprehensive categorization of language learning strategies (Ellis, 1994), and thanks to its reliability and validity, it has been used widely to collect data on large numbers of language learners (Oxford, 1999). Depending on individual differences, language learners often use learning strategies differently (Ellis, 1994).

## **Factors affecting strategy use**

Different factors have been reported to interact with language learning strategies. Age was found to have an effect on language learning strategies (LLS) use (Oxford & Erhman, 1995; Sadeghi and Attar 2012; Khezrlou 2012; Aydođan & Akbarov, 2014). Other studies pointed out to the effect of gender (Khalil, 2005; Khamkhien, 2010; Chang, 2011; Bođzinovic, 2011). Others mentioned major (Ghing-Yi, Shu-Chen, Yi-Nian, 2007; Chang, 2011; Bani Abderrahman, 2014), while others mentioned the national origin or culture as a factor that may interfere in the selection of language learning strategies (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Khamkhien, 2010). The number of languages learnt, i.e.; whether the learners are monolingual or bilingual could also affect the choice of the learning strategies (Kostic-Bobanovic & Bobanovic, 2010). The following is a review of the variables pertaining to the present study.

### **Age and LLS**

The effect of age on the selection of language learning strategies has yielded different results in the literature. In a study investigating language strategy by a group of Turkish University Preparatory English students at tertiary level in Turkey, age was not found to be connected with using the learning strategies (Aydođan & Akbarov, 2014). A similar trend was reported by Oxford and Erhman (1995). In another study conducted by Sadeghi and Attar (2012) on the use of LLS by Iranian EFL learners who began learning English at different ages, it was reported that although no big discrepancy was found, the younger beginners seemed to use slightly more LLS than the older beginners. Contrarily, Khezrlou (2012) found out that the selection of learning strategies differed among a group of Iranian young and old learners. In fact, the findings of the research show that Iranian students in all fields of study used more strategies in the reading tasks than the high school students. Similarly, Khalil (2005) found that Palestinian university students used language learning strategies more frequently than those in high school. In the same study, Kahlil also reported the effect of gender on LLS choice.

### **Gender and LLS**

Research on gender effect on learning strategies has reported contradictory results. In fact, in a study by Aslan (2009) of a group of Turkish University English Preparatory School students, it was found out that females used more language strategies in learning English than males, a finding that was also confirmed by Bođzinovic (2011) in his study of 181 participants with different native languages learning German, Spanish, French, and Italian, and Ching et al (2007) in their study of 1758 Taiwanese college EFL learners, whereby females used cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social strategies more frequently than males. Ching et al (2007) attributed such discrepancy to female's social skills, stronger verbal skills, and greater conformity to academic and linguistic norms (p. 256). Similarly, Khalil (2005) found that female students reported significantly higher strategies use than their males' counterpart.

Contrarily, Chang (2011) found that significant gender difference occurred with 11 strategy items. Of these items, eight items were used more frequently by males and three items were used more regularly by females. In fact, the difference between males and females resided in the use of three cognitive items like 'I try to speak like a native speaker', 'I practice the pronunciation of the foreign language I major in', 'I watch TV programs, movies or websites in the foreign language I major in', one metacognitive item: 'I try to speak in the foreign language I major in', three social items: 'I look for help when I don't understand the foreign language I major in', 'I look for people to speak the foreign language I major in', 'I ask

for a repetition or ask the other person to speak slowly when I don't understand the foreign language I major in', an affective item: 'I encourage myself to use the foreign I major in even when I'm afraid of making mistakes when using it'. Conversely the females differed in their use of one memory item: 'I often review what I've learned', one metacognitive item: 'I pay special attention to someone when they speak the foreign language I major in' and one social item: 'I try to understand the culture of a country I major in.'

On the other hand, Khamkhien (2010) found that gender did not affect learning strategies among Vietnamese students. However, in the same study, with the Thai students, there was no significant difference in the overall use of strategies categories between male and female learners except for the cognitive category whereby males reported a more frequent use of this category.

### **Culture and LLS**

Several studies established a link between the culture or national origin and language learning strategies. In a recent study, Khamkhien (2010) found significant differences between the Thai and the Vietnamese learners of English with additional experience in the use of the learning strategies, whereby the Thai learners used the cognitive and the compensation strategies more often than their Vietnamese counterparts. Whereas in the case where there was no additional experience, the Vietnamese learners used all the strategy categories, except for the compensation strategy, more frequently than the Thai learners. Similarly, Deneme, (2010) in an investigation of the effect of cultural differences on the selection of strategy use among three nationalities: the Jordanian, the Turkish, and the Spanish, found that the Jordanian and the Turkish participants used the memory strategies and affective strategies more frequently than their Spanish counterparts. It was also reported that the Jordanians showed a higher use of the social strategies than the Turkish participants in learning English.

### **Major and LLS**

Research on language learning strategies has suggested conflicting results concerning the effect of subject field on learners' use of learning strategies. In fact, in their study of Taiwanese EFL college students from various specialty fields including humanities and social science, business and management, science and engineering, Ching et al (2007) reported that the humanities and social science learners were more likely to use overall strategy and six subcategories of language learning strategies than did the other two majors. Indeed, the humanities and social learners seemed to use memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies more frequently than the two other majors. On the other hand, Chang's (2011) study of language learning strategy use among English major learners, European languages major learners (French and German), and Japanese majors reported that overall, the three majors displayed high use of language learning strategies. There were, nonetheless some slight differences whereby cognitive items: 'I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English', and 'I read for pleasure in English' were the only items showing significant differences between the means of the three majors. It was also found out that English majors used the social strategy item 'I ask for help from English speakers' more frequently. European languages majors reported greatest use for the metacognitive item: 'I pay attention when someone is speaking English,' and the social strategy item: 'I try to learn about the culture of English speakers'. The Japanese majors used the cognitive strategy item: 'I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English more

frequently. Similarly, Khezrlou (2012) reported that the three majors: language, humanities, and social sciences learners used the cognitive and metacognitive strategies equally.

### **Strategy use in the business context**

This section comprises two parts. In order to provide a framework against which the results of the present study can be discussed, part one deals with the different strategies used in the advertising and the pharmaceutical business. Part two presents the different business strategies used by managers, which often distinguish them from their subordinates.

### **Strategy use in the advertising and the pharmaceutical business**

In the business field, different strategies are used to promote a product or a service, and to face the challenges of today's competition. Being the main market element, marketing research and subsequent operational activities rely on the analysis of consumer behavior (Trandafilović et al, 2013). In general marketing terms, a product can be used to meet a psychological need with no concrete benefit whatsoever (Ahmed et al, 2014, p. 681). Therefore, except for the compensation strategies that are used differently in the academic and the business sector, the cited language learning strategies, being psychologically related, are also used in the business sector.

The so-called social learning strategies are used in the business field in the form of collaboration. In the context of today's socially networked society, social strategies such as collaborative work, one of the winning business strategies, have become a must in order to face the different challenges that face the business companies nowadays. Whether online through social networks (Taskiran & Yilmaz, 2015) or in companies with teams, collaborative work with both colleagues or customers helps foster information sharing and gathering, and build strong relationships with the clients both in the advertising (Taskiran & Yilmaz, 2015) and the pharmaceutical industry (Rowlands et al, 2006).

Cognitive as well as affective strategies are used to study consumer behavior, and adapt the product or service accordingly. Examples of dominantly cognitive behavior that affect the consumers' choice of goods and services range from use of logic, functionality, price-quality relationship, etc (Trandafilović et al, 2013). To attract customers, the retail business advertises price promotions, deep discount deals, flyers, and in store displays (Ailawadi et al, 2009, p. 46). In the pharmaceutical industry, a patient is attracted towards a given medicine when they know that it helps in curing or improving their condition (Ahmed et al, 2014, p.681).

Also consumers are guided by their affective behavior in such a choice. Trandafilović et al (2013) enumerate key features of affective consumer behavior as follows:

- a sudden, spontaneous urge to buy the product;
- temporary loss of self-control;
- emotional conflict and tensions;
- reducing logic and rational evaluations; and
- spending regardless of the consequences (p. 150).

In this regard, Trandafilović et al (2013) report on the use of emotional strategies by brands to affect consumers' purchase. Coca cola, for example, is a beverage that is massively consumed due to the emotional messages it carries. In fact, the reasons why this brand is so popular are that the brand carries messages of positive energy, youth, excitement, positive mood, and an insistence on linking the brand with family gatherings. In short, Coca cola brand stirs the human qualities and emotional values in the consumer as reported by Trandafilović et al (2013).

Emotional strategies are also used in the pharmaceutical industry which sells branded medicine. In fact, the function of branding is to help customers recognize particular products. Thus the buyer benefits from reduced search costs and a guaranteed level of quality that might be extended to a new product range (Bednarik, 2005). Besides, by buying brands that stand for "status and prestige, the customer reduces the social and psychological risks associated with owning and using the 'wrong' product" (p. 639).

Memory strategy use is embodied in the way consumers relate a visual or auditory representation to a given product. In fact, consumer behavior is often guided by logos, slogans, images, etc. in short everything that might remind the customer of buying a given product or service (Kapferer, 2008; Aukrust, 2011; Trandafilović et al, 2013). In this regard, Aukrust (2011) advances the idea that advertising experts use mnemonic tunes and phrases to help customers remember to buy a given brand when they see it in a shop (p. 137). Similarly, Trandafilović et al (2013) suggest that consumers remember a company's slogan, as with the example of Coca Cola, through "the radiant red color in the commercials and Coca Cola New Year truck with happy and smiling Santa Claus making a toast with a bottle of Coca Cola" (p. 151). Likewise in the pharmaceutical industry, Brands are stored in clients' memories, so they exercise a permanent influence, and as a consequence their effects extend far beyond the mere consumption of the product (Kapferer, 2008).

Concerning the metacognitive strategy use, Mantonakis et al (2013) report that marketers use metacognition in marketing their products. In fact, the readability as well as the ease of pronunciation of a given product label was reported by Mantonakis et al (2013) to have an effect on the consumers' taste related evaluation as well as the willingness to pay for the product. In the pharmaceutical sector, the use of metacognitive skills plays a significant role in the maintenance and the development of executives' professional competence in this sector (Kansanaho, 2006).

### **Business strategy use by managers**

The manager has often been likened to a leader who has the power to lead a team aiming at accomplishing common goals (Popovici, 2012), and distinguished from subordinates (Clegg et al, 2007). In fact as suggested by Clegg et al (2007) what differentiates managers from subordinates is that the formers decide whereas the latter execute. In this regard, "employees are best regarded as being reflexive automata whose routines are attuned to following rules and processes rationally decided by others" (p. 397). As a consequence, the respective working strategies may differ.

The literature has focused on four main strategies used by managers to manage their team members. In fact, Being the key person in a business organization (Cieślińska, 2007), a manager's daily tasks are complex and cognitively demanding (Schraagen et al, 2000). They include planning, supervision, priority determination and coordination (p. 356). To face such complex problems, managers make cognitive and metacognitive efforts to make daily decisions (Uotila, 2015).

Leadership roles as assumed by managers also involve the use of affective and social strategies to enhance communication within an organization (Riggio & Reichard, 2008). In



fact, as suggested by Riggio and Reichard charismatic leaders are skilful in conveying positive or negative emotions which respectively “rouse and motivate followers and build strong emotional ties with them” (p. 172), and tactfully communicate “displeasure with a colleague’s performance or disapproval of a course of action” (p. 173).

In view of such business strategies used by managers that often differentiate them from their subordinates, the main focus here is to check whether the managers in the present study use different learning strategies from their subordinates.

### **Research questions**

The aim of this study is to explore language learning strategies used by executives from two different companies trained in Business English, and set out to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the most common pattern of learning strategies for each age group?
2. Do women and men differ in their learning strategies?
3. Does the field of work affect the learning strategies?
4. Does the job position affect the learning strategies?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

The sample was 60 executives from two different companies in the private sector in Tunisia. 30 participants were from an advertising agency, 30 were from a pharmaceutical company. 31(51%) were males and 29 (49%) were females. 44 (73%) were aged between 25 and 35, and 16 (27%) were aged between 36 and 50. 29 (43%) were managers and 31 (57%) were subordinates. The nationality of the two companies was French; however, all the participants were Tunisian. The participants were offered training in Business English for more than two years with the Tunisian American Chamber of Commerce. Their levels ranged from elementary to intermediate. The same series of training resources were used with all these participants. Questionnaires were administered during one of the training sessions by the researcher herself and by some colleagues who taught different groups of the same participants. Names of the trainees as well as names of the companies were kept anonymous for ethical concern.

### **Instrument**

A questionnaire (See Appendix) divided into two section was used with the sample of the participants. Section one explored bio data of the participants including gender, age, length of learning English as a foreign language, academic achievement, current position, and company name. Section two explored learners’ learning strategies through Oxford’s (1989, version 7) fifty-item version of the Strategy Inventory For Language Learning (SILL) designed for learners of English as a second or a foreign language. The SILL has been widely used and checked for reliability (Oxford & Erhman, 1995). In the present study, reliability of the strategy use questionnaire was measured at .84 using Cronbach’s alpha.

The SILL used in the present study consists of 50 items and is classified into six categories: (a) memory strategy (items 1 to 9), (b) cognitive strategy (items 10 to 23), (c) compensation strategy (items 24 to 29), (d) metacognitive strategy (items 30 to 38), (e) affective strategy (items 39 to 44), and (f) social strategy (items 45 to 50). To assess the learners’ learning strategies, a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 is used whereby 1

refers to no or almost no strategy use (never or almost never), and 5 refers to a quite frequent strategy use (always or almost always).

### Data analysis procedure

The questionnaire items were coded and entered in an Excell spreadsheet for processing. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, standard deviations and percentages, were carried out to explore the demographic data, and the use of language learning strategies. *T-test* and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to find out whether there was any effect of the participants' background characteristics on the use of particular learning strategies.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Descriptive statistics

The participants' use of the language learning strategies was processed by means of descriptive statistics. Table 1 shows that the mean of frequency of overall strategy use was 3.23 which displays an average use of the strategies. The most frequently used strategy as displayed in table 1 was the metacognitive strategy ( $M=3.69$ ) followed by the social strategy ( $M=3.55$ ), then compensation strategy ( $M=3.48$ ).

**Table 1.** Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Language Learning Strategy Use

Strategies	Mean	Std Dev	Frequency percentage	
			m<3	m>3
Memory	2.92	.62	63.33	36.67
Cognitive	3.19	.50	31.67	68.33
Compensation	3.48	.57	28.33	71.67
Metacognitive	3.69	.59	13.33	86.67
Affective	2.48	.72	80.00	20.00
Social	3.55	.67	25.00	75.00
Overall strategy use	3.23	.38	35.00	65.00

### Research question 1

#### What is the most common pattern of learning strategies for each age group?

The effect of age on the use of the learning strategies was explored via the t-test. Table 2 displays the results of the t-test analysis of the relationship between the two age groups and the use of language learning strategies. As displayed in table 2, no significant differences were found between the two age ranges. In fact the 25 to 35 aged participants and the 36 to 50 aged participants did not display a significant difference in the overall strategy ( $t= -.07$ ,  $p=.95$ ). Note that no significant differences existed among the two age groups pertaining to the six subcategories of language strategy use.

**Table 2.** Summary of Variation in Language Learning Strategy Use by Age

Strategies	Age	N	Mean	Std Dev	Minimum	Maximum	Tvalue	Pr >  t
Memory	25-35	44	2.99	.67	1.70	4.60	1.76	.09
	36-50	16	2.73	.42	2.20	3.70		
Cognitive	25-35	44	3.13	.53	1.90	4.40	-1.81	.08
	36-50	16	3.36	.41	2.30	3.80		
Compensation	25-35	44	3.55	.61	2.20	5.00	2.09	.04
	36-50	16	3.28	.37	2.80	3.80		
Metacognitive	25-35	44	3.65	.62	2.10	5.00	-.93	.36
	36-50	16	3.80	.53	3.00	4.80		
Affective	25-35	44	2.46	.73	1.00	3.80	-.34	.74
	36-50	16	2.53	.69	1.70	4.30		
Social	25-35	44	3.50	.68	2.30	5.00	-1.06	.30
	36-50	16	3.70	.65	2.70	4.80		
Overall Strategy Use	25-35	44	3.23	.41	2.30	4.30	.07	.95
	36-50	16	3.23	.27	2.80	3.90		

## Research question 2

### Do women and men differ in their learning strategies?

This question explored the effect of gender on the learning strategy use. As displayed in table 3, males and females did not differ in the frequency of overall strategy use (Male:  $M=3.216$ , female  $M=3.237$ ). However, there was a significant difference between males and females in the use of affective strategy whereby males' mean was ( $M= 2.238$ ), whereas females' mean was ( $M=2.737$ ) ( $t=-2.84$ ,  $p=.006$ ). Also females used memory strategy more frequently ( $M = 3.024$ ) than males ( $M = 2.819$ ). On the other hand, males displayed a more frequent use of the cognitive strategy ( $M= 3.229$ ), the compensation strategy ( $M= 3.561$ ), the metacognitive strategy ( $M=3.761$ ), and the social strategy ( $M= 3.648$ ).

**Table 3.** Summary of Variation in Language Learning Strategy Use by Gender

Strategies	Gender	N	Mean	Std Dev	Minimum	Maximum	t Value	Pr >  t
Memory	Male	31	2.819	.490	2.1	4.00	-1.29	.201
	Female	29	3.024	.722	1.7	4.6		
Cognitive	Male	31	3.22	.435	2.3	3.9	.59	.558
	Female	29	3.151	.575	1.9	4.4		
Compensation	Male	31	3.561	.522	2.7	5.00	1.13	.262
	Female	29	3.396	.605	2.2	4.5		
Metacognitive	Male	31	3.761	.556	2.8	5.00	.96	.340
	Female	29	3.613	.631	2.1	4.7		
Affective	Male	31	2.238	.746	1.00	4.3	-2.84	.006
	Female	29	2.737	.599	1.8	3.8		
Social	Male	31	3.648	.705	2.3	5.00	1.16	.251
	Female	29	3.448	.626	2.3	4.7		

Overall Strategy Use	Male	31	3.216	.321	2.6	3.9	-.22	.825
	Female	29	3.237	.433	2.3	4.3		

### Research question 3

#### Does the field of work affect the learning strategies?

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics relative to the effect of the field of work on the selection of the learning strategies. As can be seen, there is no significant difference between the participants in the pharmaceutical company ( $M= 3.24$ ), and the participants in the advertising agency ( $M= 3.21$ ) in the overall strategy use. As shown in the table, significant differences existed between the pharmaceutical company and the advertising agency ( $F=5.83$ ,  $p=.02$ ) in some sub categories of learning strategies. The mean scores also suggest that the participants in the advertising agency used the memory strategy more frequently ( $M= 3.10$ ) than the participants in the pharmaceutical business ( $M=2.73$ ).

Significant differences existed between the two groups with respect to the use of the metacognitive strategy ( $F=6.81$ ,  $p= .01$ ). The resulting mean scores indicate a higher use of the metacognitive strategy on the part of the advertising participants ( $M=3.66$ ). In comparison the mean of frequency use of the pharmaceutical participants was 3.30.

In the use of the affective strategy, though there is no significant difference between the advertising participants and the pharmaceutical ones ( $F= 5.32$ ,  $p=.02$ ), the respective mean scores ( $M=2.27$ ) and ( $M=2.69$ ), show that the pharmaceutical participants were more likely to use affective strategy than the advertising ones.

Note that the compensation strategy, though not significant, nonetheless displayed some difference between the advertising and the pharmaceutical participants ( $F=2.98$ ,  $p= .09$ ) with a respective mean score of ( $M=3.56$ ) and ( $M=3.82$ ). It seems then that the advertising participants prioritize the use of the memory and the metacognitive strategy. However, the pharmaceutical participants were more likely to give priority to the affective and the compensation strategy. These results show that the job field has an effect on the selection of the learning strategy use.

**Table 4.** Summary of Variation in Language Learning Strategy Use by job field

Strategies	Company	N	Mean	Std Dev	f Value	Pr >  t
Memory	Pharma	30	2.73	.47	5.83	.02
	Advert	30	3.10	.69		
Cognitive	Pharma	30	3.21	.49	.05	.82
	Advert	30	3.18	.53		
Compensation	Pharma	30	3.82	.60	2.98	.09
	Advert	30	3.56	.56		
Metacognitive	Pharma	30	3.30	.56	6.81	.01
	Advert	30	3.66	.51		
Affective	Pharma	30	2.69	.61	5.32	.02
	Advert	30	2.27	.77		
Social	Pharma	30	3.63	.72	.89	.35
	Advert	30	3.47	.62		
Overall Strategy Use	Pharma	30	3.24	.34	.12	.74
	Advert	30	3.21	.41		

#### Research question 4

##### Does the job position affect the learning strategies?

Table 5 summarizes the data pertaining to the effect of the job position on the selection of the learning strategies. As can be noticed, there is no significant difference between the managers and the subordinates in the use of the overall strategy ( $F=.32$ ,  $p=.58$ ). The resulting mean score indicate a non significant mean difference between the managers ( $M= 3.26$ ), and their subordinates ( $M= 3.20$ ) in both companies.

Concerning the difference between the participants in the two job positions, the only acceptable significant discrepancy lies in the cognitive strategy use, whereby the ANOVA results display an F value equal to 3.22 ( $p=.08$ ). Similarly, the respective mean scores indicate a more frequent use on the part of the managers of the cognitive strategy ( $M=3.31$ ), than their subordinates ( $M=3.08$ ).

Overall, the non significant differences between the managers and the subordinates indicate that the job position does not affect the learning strategy use. Except for the cognitive strategy use, managers and subordinates, in both companies, equally use the same strategies due to their belonging to the same field of work.

**Table 5.** Summary of Variation in Language Learning Strategy Use by job position

Strategies	Company	N	Mean	Std Dev	f Value	Pr >  t
Memory	Managers	29	2.79	.52	2.64	.11
	Subordinates	31	3.04	.68		
Cognitive	Managers	29	3.31	.46	3.22	.08
	Subordinates	31	3.08	.52		
Compensation	Managers	29	3.36	.58	2.74	.10
	subordinates	31	3.60	.53		
Metacognitive	Managers	29	3.78	.68	1.38	.24
	subordinates	31	3.60	.50		
Affective	Managers	29	2.55	.80	0.55	.46
	subordinates	31	2.41	.64		
Social	Managers	29	3.69	.75	2.31	.13
	subordinates	31	3.43	.57		
Overall Strategy Use	Managers	29	3.26	.38	.32	.58
	subordinates	31	3.20	.38		

#### Discussion

The following is a summary of the findings of the present research. In general, the results indicate that the participants made a medium use of the learning strategies. The most

frequently used strategies by order of importance were the metacognitive strategy, followed by the social strategy, then the compensation strategy. This is partially in line with the findings of Sulaiman and Abdurrahman (2014) who found that their Jordanian university students used the metacognitive and the affective strategy the most frequently, while they used the social strategies the least. Such a difference may be attributed to the peculiarity of the participants in the present study. While Sulaiman and Abdurrahman's (2014) were academic the present ones were professional.

The second remark concerning the present study is that age was not found to affect the learning strategy use with this sample of executives in both the advertising agency and the pharmaceutical company under study. The lack of effect of age on strategy use agrees with findings reported by Oxford (1989), and Aydođan and Akbarov (2014). However, the present findings contradict results by Khezrlou (2012), and Khalil (2005). The absence of age effect on learning strategy use may be attributed to the fact that contrarily to high school learners and university learners who were often reported to differ in their respective selection of the strategy use due to the clear difference in the age range and also the difference between teenage and adulthood, the present participants were adults, and therefore all shared more or less the same degree of maturity.

There were significant effects of gender on learning strategy use. First of all, both males and females generally used learning strategies equally. This contradicts findings by Aslan's (2009) Turkish students, Božinovic's (2011) participants with different native languages learning English, Ching et al's (2007) Taiwanese college EFL learners, and Khalil's (2005) Palestinian EFL learners where females used more language strategies in learning English than males. A closer look at the use of the subcategories of the learning strategies reveals that females in the present study were more likely to use the affective strategy and the memory strategy, whereas males relied more on the use of the cognitive strategy, the compensation strategy, the metacognitive strategy, and the social strategy in their learning. Again, this contradicts findings by Ching-Yi et al (2007) who found that females used the cognitive strategies, the metacognitive strategies, and the social strategies more frequently than males did.

On the other hand, the present findings agree with Khamkhien's (2010) study of EFL Thai students whereby the males reported a more frequent use of the cognitive strategy. Such a discrepancy in the use of the learning strategies between the present study and the other studies may be attributed to the different nationalities of the participants. In this regard, while partially agreeing with Deneme (2010) whose Turkish and Jordanian participants, including males and females, were found to use the memory and the affective strategies, the females of the present study, by sharing more or less the same strategies, were likely to show some belonging to an Arab, Islamic culture. However, it could also be noted that despite the gender equity long established by the Code of Personal Status (CPS) <sup>2</sup> since 1956, women in Tunisia still differ from men in the way they learn.

The field of work had an effect on the selection of the learning strategy use. In fact, the main differences between the advertising participants and those from the pharmaceutical company resided in a more frequent use of the memory and the metacognitive strategy on the part of the participants in the advertising agency. The pharmaceutical company participants, on the other hand, were more likely to use the affective and the compensation strategy more frequently.

In line with the consumer psychology literature, the frequent use of the memory and the meatcognitive strategy on the part of the advertising participants is little surprise. In fact, concerning memory strategy use, Aukrust (2011) advances the idea that advertising experts use mnemonic tunes and phrases to help customers remember to buy a given brand when they see it in a shop (p. 137).

With regard to the metacognitive strategy use, the present findings seem to agree with Mantonakis et al (2013) concerning marketers use of metacognition in marketing their products. The present findings also agree with Kansanaho (2006) who suggests that the pharmaceutical executives use the metacognitive skills to develop their professional competence.

Though both types of participants did not use the affective strategy quite frequently as both of them did not reach the average use of this strategy, the participants in the pharmaceutical sector were found to use the affective strategy more frequently than those in the advertising business. This may explain the way pharmaceutical executives think about learning which may be affected by the way they market their products. In fact, in line with Bednarik (2005), people in the pharmaceutical business identify customers' affective relationships with certain medicine brands. Therefore, they know how much branded medicines affect people's choice, which might have affected their learning strategy use.

Both types of participants were also found to use the compensation strategy quite often. As the literature on business strategy did not provide enough information on the use of this strategy in the professional field, the selection of such a strategy by the participants may be explained from an academic point of view. In fact, in line with Oxford (1989), good language learners "overcome knowledge limitations through compensatory strategies, like

<sup>2</sup> For a quick review of CPS, visit <http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/modules/lesson9/lesson9.php?s=11>

guessing meanings intelligently and using synonyms or other production tricks when the precise expression is unknown" (p. 236).

Job position was found to have an effect on the selection of the learning strategies only in the cognitive strategy use. In fact, managers were found to use the cognitive strategy more often than their subordinates. This is in line with Schraagen et al (2000) who suggest that managers' daily tasks including planning, supervision, priority determination, and coordination (p. 356) require cognitive efforts. Another remark concerning the lack of difference between the managers and their subordinates in the learning strategy use may emanate from the fact that not much difference was noticed in the education level between the subordinates and their managers. In fact, the common educational levels were bachelor and master's degree. This means that while being distinguished in the working experience, both managers and subordinates shared the same learning strategies. This may reflect the common business strategy use shared between the managers and their subordinates in each company.

### **Pedagogical implications**

Some pedagogical recommendations are derived from the findings of the present study. The main aim behind exploring language learning strategy is to help learners acquire certain autonomy in their learning as termed by Oxford (1999). In fact, according to the results of this study the main variables that had an effect on the selection of foreign language learning strategies with the advertising and the pharmaceutical participants were gender, job field, and to some extent job position. Inferences may be drawn to adapt one's teaching. First, teachers or trainers should be aware of a frequent use of the females of the affective and the memory strategies, as opposed to males who are more likely to use cognitive, metacognitive, social, and compensation strategies. Second, an effective training program should take into account the memory and the metacognitive learning strategies used by the advertising business participants, and a relative use of some affective and compensation strategies by

people in the pharmaceutical industry. Third, it should be noted that due to the complex daily tasks of managers, cognitive strategy use is more likely to be taken into account. Consequently, in line with Oxford and Erhman (1995) who suggest that teachers should assist learners in using efficient learning strategies whenever possible in order to achieve effective learning, together with a needs analysis, English trainers should take into consideration learners' variables when designing and implementing a training program.

### **Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research**

This study has some limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results. First, the number of participants was limited to sixty whereby thirty participants from each sample participated in the study. Also due to the limited number of the trainees in the respective companies, no random sampling was carried out. This may have affected the results as the selected strategies pertaining to each sample may not have been representative of the strategies use by all the executives working in each company. Therefore, generalizations to larger samples should be taken with caution. Second, only quantitative descriptive data were explored in the present study. Some triangulation using qualitative data is highly recommended for future research to check the validity of the results. Thus, in order to bring out a more comprehensive study of adult learning strategies, the recommendations above should be taken into consideration.

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## Appendix

### Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL) © R. Oxford. 1989

**This questionnaire has been designed to help you identify the way(s) you learn best.**

**Part 1: Please complete the first part on bio data by highlighting the right choice.**

1. Gender: a. Male b. Female
2. Age: a. 18 - 24 b. 25 - 35 c. 36-50 d. Over 50
3. Length of learning English as a foreign language (up to now):
  - a. Less than 12 months
  - b. Over one year to four years
  - c. Over four years to nine years
  - d. Over nine years
4. Highest qualification completed
  - a. High school
  - b. Certificate/Diploma
  - c. Bachelor degree
  - d. Master's degree
  - e. Doctoral degree
  - f. Other(s) (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_
5. Current position:\_\_\_\_\_
6. Company name:\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 2:Directions:**This form of the **STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (SILL)** is for students of English as a second or foreign language. Circle the response (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) that tells **HOW TRUE OF YOU THE STATEMENT IS.**

- 1.Never or almost never true of me
- 2.Usually not true of me
- 3.Somewhat true of me
- 4.Usually true of me
- 5.Always or almost always true of me

### **Part A**

- 1.I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 2.I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them. 1 2 3 4 5
- 3.I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help remember the word. 1 2 3 4 5
- 4.I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used. 1 2 3 4 5
- 5.I use rhymes to remember new English words. 1 2 3 4 5
- 6.I use flashcards to remember new English words. 1 2 3 4 5
- 7.I physically act out new English words. 1 2 3 4 5
- 8.I review English lessons often. 1 2 3 4 5
- 9.I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign. 1 2 3 4 5

### **Part B**

- 10.I say or write new English words several times. 1 2 3 4 5
- 11.I try to talk like native English speakers. 1 2 3 4 5
- 12.I practice the sounds of English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 13.I use the English words I know in different ways. 1 2 3 4 5
- 14.I start conversations in English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 15.I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 16.I read for pleasure in English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 17.I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 18.I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully. 1 2 3 4 5
- 19.I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 20.I try to find patterns in English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 21.I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand. 1 2 3 4 5
- 22.I try not to translate word-for-word. 1 2 3 4 5
- 23.I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English. 1 2 3 4 5

**Part C**

- 24.To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses. 1 2 3 4 5
- 25.When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures. 1 2 3 4 5
- 26.I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 27.I read English without looking up every new word. 1 2 3 4 5
- 28.I try to guess what the other person will say next in English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 29.If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing. 1 2 3 4 5

**Part D**

- 30.I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 31.I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better. 1 2 3 4 5
- 32.I pay attention when someone is speaking English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 33.I try to find out how to be a better learner of English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 34.I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 35.I look for people I can talk to in English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 36.I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 37.I have clear goals for improving my English skills. 1 2 3 4 5
- 38.I think about my progress in learning English. 1 2 3 4 5

**Part E**

- 39.I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 40.I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake. 1 2 3 4 5
- 41.I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 42.I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 43.I write down my feelings in a language learning diary. 1 2 3 4 5
- 44.I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English 1 2 3 4 5

**Part F**

- 45.If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again. 1 2 3 4 5
- 46.I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk. 1 2 3 4 5
- 47.I practice English with other students. 1 2 3 4 5
- 48.I ask for help from English speakers. 1 2 3 4 5
- 49.I ask questions in English. 1 2 3 4 5
- 50.I try to learn about the culture of English speakers. 1 2 3 4 5