# The Relationship between EFL Learners' Use of Language Learning Strategies and Self-Perceived Language Proficiency

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The present study was conducted to investigate whether there was a relationship between EFL learners' use of language learning strategies and their self-perceived language proficiency at the two levels of intermediate and advanced. A total of 67 subjects (39 intermediate-level and 28 advanced) were selected to participate in this study based on their scores on a piloted language proficiency test. They were asked to respond to two questionnaires: one assessing their self-perceived language proficiency and the other the strategy inventory of language learning. The results of the statistical analysis demonstrated that there was a significant relationship between the two variables among advanced-level subjects while no such relationship existed among intermediates. Thence, as learners reach higher stages of language proficiency, they become more capable of assessing their language abilities and also use their learning strategies more often. Further analysis also revealed that subjects did not change their attitude in using strategies as they reached higher stages of proficiency except for memory and social strategies. Finally, the results showed that the most frequently used set of strategies among both intermediate and advanced learners were cognitive while the least were affective.
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The field of second language acquisition is fundamentally centered on finding highly efficient ways for learners to gain the desired amount of language proficiency. The very complex process of learning an L2 which involves a sizeable plethora of variables has intrigued researchers and academics with the challenge of identifying and thus attempting to control the various factors that affect the process. This path, of course, they pursue with the objective of being able to facilitate L2 acquisition for the ever-increasing populace of such learners in this extremely globalized world.

Among the many areas being explored by L2 education specialists (both at the theory and practice level) which have been growing momentum in recent times are the two issues of how to prepare language learners to assess their proficiency and how to use the strategies that help them learn an L2 more easily. There is abundant evidence in the SLA literature supporting the idea that learners at higher levels of proficiency make more frequent use of successful learning strategies (for example, Bidabadi & Yamat, 2011; Green & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2010). However, the learners' perceived proficiency level may not necessarily match their actual level of proficiency. Moreover, it is not still clear how learners' assessment of their proficiency level, or their self assessment, corresponds to their strategy use. Learners' self-assessments, whether carried out consciously or unconsciously, results in the establishment of certain beliefs about their abilities and efficacy. Nevertheless, many studies, such as the one by Yang (1999) have shown that learners' self-efficacy beliefs are highly correlated with their strategy use.

Moreover, both self-assessment or self-perception and learning strategy use are proved to result in autonomous learners, which is a desirable outcome of any EFL/ESL teaching-learning context. According to Kinoshita (2003), through receiving strategy instruction learners adopt an active or even reactive role in the learning process and when their knowledge of learning strategies becomes procedural there will be a positive backwash impact on learners' motivation level, self-efficacy, learner autonomy, transfer skills, and language proficiency. On the other hand, supporters of

self-assessment training believe that it results in developing learners who have skill in evaluating their weaknesses and strengths and can set learning goals for themselves and hence become self-directed (or autonomous) language learners (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Dickinson, 1987; Oscarsson, 1997).

Consequently, due to the importance of these two issues, both private and public language schools and academic and nonacademic settings are investing considerable funds and allocations on promoting and establishing methods and techniques in helping learners to acquire awareness of their abilities in using English as an L2 and know how to use language learning strategies in order to become independent and autonomous learners. This apprehended need for assisting the learners in the mentioned areas is the main rationale for further research on the relationship between language learners' use of learning strategies and their self-perceived language proficiency, or as used synonymously here "self-assessment".

## Language Learning Strategies

Undoubtedly the main focus of all SLA research in recent decades has been to find ways to facilitate the language teaching-learning process. In this attempt various scholars have struggled to either speculate on or investigate techniques and strategies for effective teaching and learning, some of which have resulted in probing into the practices of effective and successful teachers and learners and modeling and recommending their strategies to other teachers and learners. Thus, there is no surprise why the literature embraces an enormous collection of studies on language learning strategies (for example, Dornyei, 2005; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975).

Different scholars have provided different definitions for language learning strategies, but there seems to be a common consensus over strategies being actions deliberately chosen by learners (for example, Chamot, 1987; MacIntyre, 1994; Oxford, 1990) which result in some sort of facilitation or effectiveness of the learning. Griffiths (cited in Griffiths, 2010) defines language learning strategies as "activities consciously chosen by learners for

the purpose of regulating their own language learning" (p. 3). Similarly, Oxford (1990) believes that language learning strategies are actions taken by the learners to make learning more self-directed. More recently, Cohen (2010, p. 682) has defined language learning strategies as "thoughts and actions, consciously selected by learners, to assist them in learning and using language in general, and in the completion of specific language tasks".

Evidence supports the relationship between frequent language learning strategy use and language proficiency level of the learners (Oxford, 1989) as well as language learning success (Grifiths, 2010). It is very unreasonable, though, to claim that unsuccessful learners or those at lower proficiency levels do not use language learning strategies at all but it is the frequency and choice of the strategies (Chamot & Kupper, 1980) and the way to orchestrate different strategies based on the learner's need (Oxford, 1990) that differs among different learners. Abraham and Vann (1987) found that less able learners used strategies in a random, unconnected, and uncontrolled manner while more effective learners showed careful orchestration of strategies, targeted in a relevant, systematic way at specific L2 tasks. Furthermore, significant positive correlation was also found between learners' language learning strategy use and their self-perceived proficiency (Su, 2005). On the whole, language learning strategies have proved to be related to many other features and characteristics of the language learner. Griffiths (2010) reviews a variety of such factors namely, age, gender, motivation, personality, and nationality.

Alongside the many studies conducted on learners' strategies and also the attempts to classify these strategies into various categories, abundant research has also been done to address the issue of improving learners' learning strategies with conflicting outcomes. While in many investigations, attempts to teach students to use learning strategies (called strategy training or strategy instruction) have produced promising results (Wenden & Rubin, 1997), some such trainings have been effective in various skill areas but not in others, even within the same study (Oxford & Crookle, 1989). Nevertheless, there is little – if any – argument against the importance of strategy training which should provide

learners with a mechanism to evaluate their own progress and to evaluate the success of the training and the value of the strategies in multiple tasks.

## Language Proficiency

Perhaps the most scrutinized characteristic of EFL/ESL learners is their English language proficiency. Hence, in order to deal with any issue pertinent to English language learning or teaching, it is first necessary to understand what language proficiency is. This, indubitably, is not a readily available task as various scholars adopt epistemologically different approaches in providing their definitions for language proficiency. For instance, Biere (1972) defines it as the degree of competence or capability in a given language demonstrated by an individual at a given point in time independent of a specific textbook, chapter in the book, or pedagogical method. Such definitions complicate the issue because the key term used, that is competence, not only stands ambiguous by itself, but also could refer to linguistic, social, or other types of competencies related to language proficiency (Farhady, 1980).

Another definition that improved somewhat the previous one was provided by Clark (1972) who considers proficiency to be the use of language for real life purposes without regard to the manner in which that competence was acquired. Richards, Weber, and Platt (1992) argue that language proficiency is a person's skill in using a language for specific purposes. Valdes and Figueroa (1994) maintain that proficiency is what it takes to know a language beyond the simplistic view of good pronunciation, correct grammar, and even mastery of rules of politeness. They further argue that knowing a language and knowing how to use it involves a mastery and control of a large number of independent components and elements that interact with one another and that are affected by the nature of the situation in which communication takes place.

Stern (1983) founds his definition upon straightforward everyday examples and maintains that proficiency in another language is not merely an issue of simple and limited activities such as ordering dinner in a restaurant or exchanging a few words

with a friend but encompasses establishing meaningful contact with diverse people, exchange relevant information and opinions on a variety of issues and expands on to the understanding of historical contexts, sensitivity to delicate nuances and values, and the appreciation of the dialects of the target language.

In fact, as a result of the multivariate nature and multifarious definitions of the concept of proficiency, there is a need for clarification of the intended meaning of proficiency in any empirical study. Therefore, the term "proficiency" has acquired a variety of meanings and connotations in different contexts (Bachman, 1990).

Furthermore, proficiency can be looked at as a goal and thus be elaborated in terms of objectives and standards, serving as a criterion for assessing the actual performance of given individual learners or groups of learners (Stern, 1983). Accordingly, a huge area of L2 research is focused on the definition, construction, and application of language proficiency tests which seek to measure the degree a learner is able to practically demonstrate his/her knowledge of language usage and use.

A proficiency test is not linked to a particular course of instruction but measures the learner's general level of language mastery. Although this may be a result of previous instruction and learning, the latter are not the focus of attention (Richards et al., 1992). In this sense, assessment is an ongoing strategy through which learning is not only mentioned, but by which students are involved in making decisions about the degree to which their performance matches their ability. Therefore, it can be viewed as an interactive process that engages both teachers' and students' performances (Hancock, 1994). There are naturally different methods of language assessment including self-assessment which falls within the domain of this study.

## Self-Assessment

The topic of self-assessment (variously termed self-rating, self-appraisal, self-control, etc.) began to expand as a distinct field of interest in language testing and evaluation in the late 1980s (Blanche & Merino, 1989) and is now considered as one of the

alternatives in assessment (Brown, 2004). Self-assessment or self-evaluation, according to Richards et al. (1992), is examining one's own performance on or success in doing a language task. According to Oscarsson (1989), self-assessment is what the students see from their own perspectives; self-assessment can promote learning because it gives learners training in evaluation which is important for autonomous learning. Blanche and Merino (1989) assert that self-assessment can play different roles in learner's development. They first point to the importance of the learners being able to evaluate their own performance without constant recourse to teachers or external sources and then they highlight that self-assessment accuracy is a prerequisite for learner autonomy.

According to Harris (1997), self-assessment is most needed to focus on learners' perception of progress. Self-assessment can help learners to locate their own strengths and weaknesses and then get them to think about what they need to do in order to get better marks. Furthermore, self-assessment can increase awareness of individual's progress, not only in terms of language but in terms of communicative objectives, so that skills development can be seen as a gradual, rather than an all-or-nothing process. Systematic self-assessment provides an idea for other learners' development activities: organizing, planning learning, thinking about learning style, discussion of learning, and communication strategies.

Contrary to the common understanding of self-assessment, it is not merely an informal exercise based on students' intuition even if this is what students do most of the time (Mousavi, 1999). Rather self-assessment can happen in the shape of formal evaluation entailing a chance to promote learning and evaluation, raised level of awareness, and improved goal orientation.

It is widely accepted that self-assessment is a key learning strategy for autonomous language learning, enabling students to monitor their progress and relate learning to individual needs. And in line with these premises, the prime objective of the present study was to find out whether there was any relationship between the language learning strategy use and the self-perceived proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. Furthermore, the study

intended to investigate whether the nature and degree of this relationship would change with the proficiency level of the participants. Finally, the relation between participants' self-perceived and test-measured proficiency was sought.

Consequently, in order to achieve the above mentioned objective, the following research questions were proposed:

1. Is there any significant relationship between the language learning strategies employed by intermediate and advanced EFL learners and their self-perceived language proficiency?

2. Is there any significant relationship between the language learning strategies employed by EFL learners and their self-perceived proficiency of the four skills?

3. Is there any significant relationship between the self-perceived language proficiency and the test-measured proficiency of EFL learners?

4. What language learning strategies do intermediate and advanced EFL learners employ more frequently?

## Method

To provide responses to the above research questions and accordingly verify the null hypotheses, a series of measures were taken among a specific sample of participants. Details of these steps taken in the course of the study are presented below.

### *Participants*

Sixty students were included in the pilot study while 90 participated in the main study. Both groups were EFL learners in the Jahad Daneshgahi Language School of Iran University of Medical Sciences. Their age ranged from 20 to 50 and their gender and socioeconomic backgrounds were not included as a variable. The participants were selected from among the students who were studying at intermediate and advanced levels. The rationale behind the selection of intermediate and advanced students was to have participants who had already passed some semesters at one

language school in which they were supposed to have gained some familiarity with the concept of learning strategies and self-assessment. Having said that, however, the participants of the study did receive a short period of instruction about language learning strategies, as well as how to fill out the self-perceived language proficiency (SPLP) questionnaire.

Since the purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between language learning strategies use and self-perceived proficiency at two levels (intermediate and advanced), all the participants had to be also tested on their language proficiency by means of a reliable language proficiency test in order to be able to determine their actual language proficiency level. They also had to complete the 50-item SILL questionnaire and the 46-item SPLP questionnaire. After the administration of the proficiency test, 67 participants were chosen to fill the aforementioned questionnaires.

*Instrumentation*

Three different instruments were used for collecting data from the participants in this study:

a) A Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) to determine the participants' actual proficiency level;

b) The SILL questionnaire to gain insights regarding the language learning strategies the learners used during their language learning effort; and

c) The SPLP questionnaire to become familiar with the way participants perceived their proficiency level.

The detailed descriptions of each of the instruments are stated below.

The TOEFL was administered to measure the proficiency level of the participants and to divide them into two groups: intermediate and advanced. The test consisted of three separately timed sections. The first two parts consisted of the structure and the reading subtests. The structure subtest was comprised of 30 items and candidates were given 30 minutes to answer this part.

The reading section included 30 items with a 35-minute time allocation. These two subtests were selected from an original 1995 version of the TOEFL. The third subtest included 35 vocabulary items with a time allocation of 30 minutes. This subtest was extracted from the "Essential words for the TOEFL" (Barrons, 2004). Firstly, in the pilot study, 60 students at two levels, intermediate and advanced, were selected to take an original TOEFL test. The candidates were both males and females. After piloting, the item facility indices were calculated, and 85 items with the item facility between 0.15 and 0.85 were kept and 11 items whose facility indices were below 0.15 and above 0.85 were omitted. The researchers estimated the reliability of the revised test by means of the Cronbach alpha. Then, the modified test was administered to the students at the intermediate and advanced levels of the language school. Based on the results, the two required groups at two intermediate and advanced levels were selected.

The SILL is one form of summative rating scale which is proven to have a very high utility, reliability, and validity. It consists of 50 items in six categories: cognitive, metacognitive, memory, compensatory, affective, and social strategies. It uses a choice of five Likert-scale responses for each strategy item, ranging from 1 to 5 ("never or almost never true of me" to "always or almost always true of me"). Therefore, it has been considered to be appropriate by virtue of qualities which are common to Likert-scale questionnaires as instruments for strategy assessment; they are quick and easy to administer, comparatively cost effective, and easy to score. The questionnaire delimits the responses to information that is relevant and simplifies data manipulation so that computers can be used for data coding and analysis. For the above mentioned reasons, the SILL was used to assess the use of learning strategy by the subjects in this study.

Owing to the novelty of the topic, there was no reliable questionnaire to gain insight into the participants' perception of their proficiency. As a result, a 46-item questionnaire was developed by the researchers. The questionnaire included four sections: listening (12 items), reading (12 items), speaking (12

items) and writing (10 items) with the five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (from "very poor" to "very good"). The items were chosen regarding the different situations that the participants might encounter in using a second language. This questionnaire was given to 5 intermediate students in prior to its main administration order to check the comprehensibility of the questions.

*Procedure*

The procedures undertaken by the researchers in this study are reported in four consecutive stages to better demonstrate the steps taken in testing the underlying hypotheses.

***Stage 1 – Piloting the Proficiency Test:*** As stated earlier, a TOEFL test was used to determine the participants' proficiency levels. The 90-item test was piloted among 60 students who had been placed at the upper proficiency levels according to the school's placement test. Consequently, five items falling outside the acceptable item facility range were removed and a proficiency test comprising 85 items and enjoying a reliability of 0.81 was made ready for the actual administration.

***Stage 2 – Selecting the Participants:*** The piloted test was administered to two groups of 45 students who were each studying at the intermediate and advanced levels, respectively (based on the placement test of the language school). In each group, those participants whose scores were within one standard deviation below and above the mean (36.78 for the intermediate group and 45.70 for the advanced group) were selected as the participants of the study. Thus a total of 39 students with their scores ranging from 25 to 48 were selected as the participants in the intermediate group. And a total of 28 students with their scores ranging from 43 to 63 were chosen as the participants in the advanced group. Altogether a total of 67 students thus participated in the study.

***Stage 3 – Administering the SILL Questionnaire:*** The SILL questionnaire was administered to the selected participants at the two proficiency levels after a short instruction. The items were explained in order to minimize the possible errors because of students' varying levels of English and the students were briefed

on how to answer and fill out the questionnaire and the researchers emphasized that only their right answers would be useful for the data analysis of the study. Then, every student received a questionnaire and an answer sheet. On top of the answer sheet, the students were asked to write their first and last names, age, and levels (based on their scores on the proficiency test) and to choose one of the alternatives ranging from 1 standing for "never" to 5 standing for "always" in order to answer the questionnaire.

***Stage 4 – Administering the SPLP Questionnaire:*** This questionnaire was administered in the third session after the researchers checked that the answers to the first questionnaire were complete. Again, similar to the administration of the former questionnaire, this questionnaire was distributed among the participants and the researchers explained how the questionnaire had to be filled out.

*Design*

The researchers did not have any control over the selection and manipulation of the independent or predictor variables in this study and, hence, the design of the research was ex post facto. The independent variable in this study was the participants' self-perceived proficiency while the dependent or predicted variable was the learners' use of language strategies. Proficiency level could be considered as the moderator variable.

Results

Several series of statistical analyses were conducted in this study in the process of responding to the research questions and verifying the hypotheses. First, item analysis and descriptive statistics were conducted on the piloted language proficiency test with the estimation of reliability. Descriptive statistics were also conducted for the actual administration of the proficiency test (described in stages 1 and 2 above).

The next step was the SILL and SPLP questionnaires that were administered at the two intermediate and advanced levels. The data was coded and entered into a computer and analyzed

using SPSS. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, means, standard deviations, and percentages were reported in order to understand the learners' learning strategy use and their perception of their proficiency.

Subsequently, a Pearson correlation was performed to determine the relationship between learners' self-perceived proficiency and their use of language learning strategies and ultimately, regression analysis was used to specify whether the participants' self-perceived proficiency predicted the use of strategies or not. Moreover, another Pearson correlation was used to investigate the correlation among the four language skills and six learning strategies. Finally, the relation between learners' self-perceived and test-measured proficiency was also calculated by Pearson correlation.

*Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of the SILL and SPLP Questionnaires*

Once the participants of the study were put in place (through the procedures already discussed above in detail), they were given the two questionnaires: SILL and SPLP. After administering the questionnaires among the 67 participants at the two levels of intermediate and advanced, the Cronbach alpha was computed to estimate the reliability of these two questionnaires at both levels. The results showed 0.873 for the SPLP and 0.824 for the SILL. As both indexes were comfortably high, the next step was to compute the relationship between the two variables. Moreover, the normality of all the total score distributions were checked through skewness ratio and they were all within the acceptable range, thus legitimizing running the Pearson correlation.

*Language Learning Strategies and SPLP*

For a general analysis to see whether there was a significant correlation between participants' (irrespective of their proficiency level) application of language learning strategies and their SPLP, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used on the total scores of the 67 participants on these two questionnaire (Table 1).

Table 1

*Correlation between the Participants' Scores on the SILL and SPLP*

| | | Total SILL |
|---|---|---|
| Total SPLP | Pearson Correlation | .258* |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .035 |
| | N | 67 |

The correlation coefficient level came out to be 0.26 at the 0.05 level of significance. Although the correlation is not high, it is significant at this level and it indicates that the more the learners are aware of their proficiency, the more they use strategies in learning English.

Following this step, the linear regression was used to model the value of the predicted or dependent variable based on its linear relationship with the predictor or independent variable. As already stated, the participants' self-perceived proficiency (their performance on the SPLP) was considered as the independent or predictor variable of this study while language strategy use (their performance on the SILL) the dependent or predicted variable. Table 2 below shows the strength of the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable.

Table 2

*Regression Model Summary (SILL & SPLP) for All Participants*

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | .258(a) | .067 | .052 | 17.462 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Total SPLP
b. Dependent Variable: Total SILL

As it is demonstrated in table 2 above, 6.7% of the variation in learners' language strategy use is explained by the predictor variable, that is, SPLP (R squared = 0.067). Regression analysis was used to check to what extent SPLP had predictability for the learners' use of learning strategies at the two intermediate and

advanced levels. The results of this analysis and the calculated *t*-value are illustrated in table 3.

Table 3
*Coefficients of the Regression (SILL & SPLP)*

| Model | | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | (Constant) | 106.899 | 25.829 | | 4.139 | .000 |
| | Total SPLP | .341 | .158 | .258 | 2.155 | .035 |

The model proved that for the 67 participants of this study, SPLP had a significant predictability for SILL (Beta = 0.258, $t = 2.155$, and $p = 0.035$ which is lower than 0.05).

*Language Learning Strategies and SPLP at the Intermediate Level*

As the statistical analysis conducted established the overall relationship between language learning strategies and SPLP, the next step was to specifically focus on the relationship between the mentioned variables among intermediate learners. In order to determine the relationship and predictability between these two variables at the intermediate level, the regression analysis using the enter method was applied.

Table 4
*Regression Model Summary (SILL & SPLP) for Intermediate Learners*

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | .223(a) | .050 | .024 | 18.654 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Total SPLP
b. Dependent Variable: Total SILL
c. Proficiency level=Intermediate

The results of the regression analysis showed that there was not a significant correlation between the SILL and SPLP (R = 0.223) at the 0.05 level of significance (Table 4).

Table 5
*Coefficients of the Regression (SILL & SPLP) for the Intermediate Learners*

| Model | | B | Std. Error | Beta | T | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | (Constant) | 114.469 | 35.513 | | 3.223 | .003 |
| | Total SPLP | .309 | .222 | .223 | 1.394 | .172 |

Table 5 shows that SPLP did not have predictability for SILL at the intermediate level (Beta = 0.223, $t$ = 1.394, $p$ = 0.172 which is higher than 0.05).

*Language Learning Strategies and SPLP at the Advanced Level*

In order to examine whether significant predictability of SILL by SPLP existed for the advanced level another regression analysis was run this time only entering the scores of the advanced students. The results of the regression analysis demonstrated that there was a significant relationship (R = 0.432 at 0.05 level of significance) between advanced participants' SPLP and SILL (Table 6).

Table 6
*Regression Model Summary (SILL & SPLP) for Advanced Learners*

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | .432(a) | .186 | .155 | 15.314 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Total SPLP
b. Dependent Variable: Total SILL
c. Proficiency level=Advanced

Table 7
*Coefficients of the Regression (SILL & SPLP) for the Advanced Learners*

| Model | | B | Std. Error | Beta | T | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | (Constant) | 63.235 | 39.924 | | 3.223 | .125 |
| | Total SPLP | .581 | .238 | .432 | 2.439 | .022 |

Table 7 indicates that the students' language strategy use could be predicted form their SPLP (Beta = 0.432, $t$ = 2.44, $p$ = 0.022 which is lower than 0.05). Therefore, the related null hypothesis was rejected meaning that there was a significant relationship and, hence, predictability between advanced-level students' self-perceived language proficiency and their language strategy use.

*Language Learning Strategies among Learners and Their Self-Perceived Proficiency of the Four Skills*

In order to find an appropriate answer to the second question, the SPLP questionnaire was used to elicit students' self-assessment regarding different language skills and the researchers sought to find further relationship between language learning strategies and each self-assessed language skill, that is, listening, reading, speaking, and writing. To this end, a Pearson correlation coefficient was performed to determine the relationships between the learners' use of the six language learning strategies (described in the instrumentation section) and their self-perceived proficiency of the four language skills (Tables 8-11).

Table 8
*The Correlation between Participants' Self-Perceived Proficiency of Listening and Learning Strategies*

|  | memory | cognitive | compensatory | metacognitive | affective | social |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Listening Pearson correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N | .62 .616 67 | .155 .200 67 | .166 .181 67 | .306* .012 67 | .095 .445 67 | .006 .958 67 |

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 8 indicates that the listening skill was only significantly correlated with the metacognitive strategies (r = 0.306) at 0.05.

Table 9
*The Correlation between Participants' Self-Perceived Proficiency of Reading and Learning Strategies*

|  | Memory | cognitive | compensatory | metacognitive | affective | social |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reading Pearson correlation | .079 | .235 | .292* | .251* | -.195 | -.056 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .526 | .055 | .017 | .040 | .114 | .651 |
| N | 67 | 67 | 67 | 67 | 67 | 67 |

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As demonstrated by Table 9, the reading skill was significantly correlated with the compensatory strategies (r = 0.292) and the metacognitive strategies (r = 0.251) at 0.05 level.

Table 10
*The Correlation between Participants' Self-Perceived Proficiency of Speaking and Learning Strategies*

|  | Memory | cognitive | compensatory | metacognitive | affective | social |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Speaking Pearson correlation | -.075 | .042 | .138 | .170 | .005 | -.001 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.547 | .739 | .267 | .170 | .966 | .995 |
| N | 67 | 67 | 67 | 67 | 67 | 67 |

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

No significant correlation was discovered between the speaking skill and the six strategies either at 0.05 or 0.01 (Table 10).

Table 11
*The Correlation between Participants' Self-Perceived Proficiency of Writing and Learning Strategies*

|  | Memory | cognitive | compensatory | metacognitive | affective | social |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Writing Pearson correlation | -.046 | .389** | .150 | .415** | .002 | .183 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .714 | .001 | .226 | .000 | .862 | .138 |
| N | 67 | 67 | 67 | 67 | 67 | 67 |

**correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

According to Table 11, there was a significant relationship between the writing skill and the cognitive strategies (r = 0.398) and the metacognitive strategies (r = 0.415) at 0.01.

*SPLP and Test-Measured Proficiency*

In order to estimate the relationship between the students' real English language proficiency, as measured by the TOEFL test, and their self-perceived proficiency, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated (Table 12).

Table 12
*Correlation between Learners' Test-Measured and Self-Perceived Proficiency*

|  |  | Total proficiency test |
|---|---|---|
| Total SPLP | Pearson Correlation | .308* |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed) | .011 |
|  | N | 67 |

As Table 12 shows, there was a significant correlation between the students' test-measured proficiency and their self-perceived proficiency (r = 0.308, $p$ <0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis underlying the third question of the study which stated that there is no significant relationship between the self-perceived

language proficiency and the test-measured proficiency of the EFL learners was rejected.

*More Frequently Used Learning Strategies of Intermediate Students*

In order to be able to identify the most frequently used language learning strategies of intermediate learners in this study (the forth research question), the collected data from the SILL questionnaire was analyzed statistically as it appears in Table 13.

Table 13
*Descriptive Statistics for Intermediate Learners' Language Learning Strategies*

| Strategy Group | N | Mean | SD | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subtotal A: Memory | 39 | 27.79 | 4.94 | 3 |
| Subtotal B: Cognitive | 39 | 44.38 | 7.31 | 1 |
| Subtotal C: Compensation | 39 | 20.77 | 3.08 | 5 |
| Subtotal D: Metacognitive | 39 | 31.82 | 4.69 | 2 |
| Subtotal E: Affective | 39 | 17.44 | 3.09 | 6 |
| Subtotal F: Social | 39 | 21.59 | 4.02 | 4 |

As illustrated in Table 13, among the six categories of language learning strategies, the participants reported using cognitive strategies the most (mean = 44.38), and affective strategies the least (mean = 17.44). The mean frequency of using direct strategies, that is, memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, lay between 20.77 and 44.3 while, the mean frequency of using indirect strategies, that is, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies, ranged from 17.44 to 31.82. One can see that the intermediate students' use of indirect strategies (with a mean of 23.61) was relatively lower than direct strategies (with a mean of 30.98).

*More Frequently Used Learning Strategies of Advanced Students*

To discover the most frequently used language learning strategies among advanced learners, the same statistical procedure was conducted with the results displayed in Table 14.

Table 14
*Descriptive Statistics for Advanced Learners' Language Learning Strategies*

| Strategy Group | N | Mean | SD | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subtotal A: Memory | 28 | 25.96 | 4.78 | 3 |
| Subtotal B: Cognitive | 28 | 46.61 | 5.46 | 1 |
| Subtotal C: Compensation | 28 | 20.79 | 3.05 | 4 |
| Subtotal D: Metacognitive | 28 | 31.61 | 6.00 | 2 |
| Subtotal E: Affective | 28 | 16.89 | 3.54 | 6 |
| Subtotal F: Social | 28 | 18.50 | 3.92 | 5 |

The results indicated that among the six categories of the SILL, the participants reported using cognitive strategies the most (mean = 46.61) and affective strategies the least (mean = 16.89). The mean frequency of using direct strategies, that is, memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies fell between 20.79 and 46.61; however, the mean frequency of using indirect strategies, that is, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies were between 16.89 and 31.61. This shows that the advanced learners' use of indirect strategies (with a mean frequency of 22.33) was relatively lower than that of the direct strategies (with a mean frequency of 31.12).

Discussion and Conclusions

The results obtained in the process of responding to the first research question demonstrated that the more EFL learners perceived their proficiency to be at higher levels, the more frequently they used learning strategies. This finding was independent of the learners' level of proficiency, that is, it applied to the 67 participants of the study irrespective of their actual or test-measured proficiency. However, when the participants were divided to advanced and intermediate levels based on their test-measured proficiency level different results were obtained. That is, a significant correlation and thus predictability was found between language strategy use and self-perceived proficiency for advanced learners, but the results was not significant for the intermediate level. Consequently, the actual or test-measured proficiency of the

participants affected the degree of the overall relationship between learning strategies and self-perceived proficiency.

Furthermore, when the learners' self-perceptions or self-assessments were broken down into the four sub-skills, significant correlation was found between some of the skills and some of the learning strategies. The findings demonstrated that the overall relationship between language learning strategies and self-perceived proficiency is more dependent upon the relationship between writing and listening with the metacognitive strategy as the highest correlation existed between writing and metacognitive and cognitive strategies, and listening and metacognitive strategy.

The significant correlation that was found between the self-perceived and test-measured proficiency of the participants indicated that those who obtained a higher score on the TOEFL proficiency test also held higher perceptions of their ability level. This could be an evidence for the validity of the SPLP questionnaire that was designed for this study by the researchers and the validity of the findings of the study.

Finally, the descriptive statistics on the frequently used learning strategies of the two proficiency levels demonstrated similar results for the two groups of participants. From these findings, one can conclude that the use of indirect strategies in both groups (intermediate and advanced) was lower than direct strategies. However, compared to the intermediate learners, the advanced learners demonstrated higher mean frequencies for direct strategies (31.12 > 30.98). On the contrary, the intermediate learners demonstrated higher mean frequencies for indirect strategies (23.61 > 22.33).

The results of this study are in line with some other studies. In terms of the correlation between test-measured and self-perceived proficiency, Blanche and Merino (1989) present a pattern in the studies they examined of generally consistent overall agreement between self-assessment and other external variables measuring ability. Moreover, the significant correlation between learners' self-perceived proficiency and learning strategy use supported the similar findings of other studies such as the one by Su (2005). Finally, since at different proficiency levels, learners

use different learning strategies with varying frequency and they may also have different perceptions of their language ability, it is quite logical that the proficiency level of the students affect the nature and degree of relationship between their strategy use and self-perceived proficiency.

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, self-assessment practices or instruction which develops learners' self-perception of their abilities paves the way to developing autonomous learners (Blanche & Merino, 1989). Moreover, adult language learners "are fully capable of making reliable judgments about their own mastery of a foreign language, provided they have adequate instruments" (Von Elek, cited in Hudson, 2001, p. 60). Moreover, strategy instruction also leads to autonomous learners (Griffiths, 2010; Oxford, 1990) and thus, if the goal of learning for learners is to become self-sufficient and independent in language use, then training and instruction in self-assessment is needed because it can raise learners' awareness of language, their performance, and their needs and at the same time, learners should become familiar with a variety of strategies in order to know how to compensate their shortcomings in using a second or foreign language.

As far as the researchers are concerned, the findings of this study may have a certain number of implications for the practice of ELT which can be stated in the form of the following recommendations:

1. Language instructors and learners should understand and become aware of both language strategies and their relationship with learners' self-perceived proficiency. Learners need to be equipped with knowledge and skill to conduct self-assessment and receive information on which strategies are more useful for their level of proficiency.

2. Since cognitive strategies were identified as the most commonly used strategy categories by the two mentioned groups (intermediate and advanced) in this study, language instructors, schools, and education authorities should pay more attention to this strategy category and the findings of this study to be able to offer various opportunities for students to utilize strategies in their language learning. Furthermore,

instructors should focus not only on the strategies that students originally employ but also raise their students' awareness of other strategies they use less frequently or not at all.

3. Since both groups demonstrated less frequent use of indirect strategies, it is important that teachers who teach intermediate and advanced students draw their attention to indirect strategies and foster their application.

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Appendix

*Language Learning Strategies and Self-Perceived Language Proficiency*

This is a strange paper because it never tells us why the relationship btw language learning strategies and self-perceived language proficiency must be investigated. In the introduction and the literature section, the author just defines each of the variables but he/she never says anything about their relationship. The greatest flaw is the conclusions and implications section. Most of this part has been allocated to the repetition of the results and in the remainder we see no mention of the way these results are related to theoretical bases of learning or a controversial issue in the field, if any of course. Implications 1 and 2 are quite irrelevant to this study.  Identifying strategies used by learners (no. 2) and making them conscious of the strategies they use (no. 1) are not based on the findings of this study.

Some other points are mentioned below:

## A.

Many parts in the section on Language Learning Strategies have been copied from

**A Study of EFL Technological and Vocational College Students' Language Learning Strategies and their Self-Perceived English Proficiency** by Min-hsun Maggie Su. Exact extracts include the following:

1. . . . goal of higher education is to cultivate students' attitudes, habits, and competences as a lifelong learner.

2. Research has shown that second language proficiency is related to language learning strategies (Oxford, 1989). All language learners use certain types of language learning strategies to a certain level but there are differences in the frequency and choice of use among different learners (Chamot and Kupper, 1989). It appears that successful language learners have the ability to orchestrate and combine particular types of language learning strategies in effective ways according to their own learning needs (Oxford, 1990). Thus, to facilitate the learners' language learning and to promote learner autonomy, language learning strategy is a key point for instructors to pay attention to.

3. Chamot (1987) defined them as techniques, approaches, or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information.

4. Oxford (1990) provided an even more specific definition by stating that learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations.

5. MacIntyre (1994) emphasized learners' deliberate action of language learning strategies as the actions chosen by language students that are intended to facilitate language acquisition and communication.

6. In order to understand language learning strategies and how they can be used to help students' language learning,

researchers have tried to identify the language learning strategies used by good/effective language learners.

**B.**

Questions 1 and 2 can be combined together; this is also true for questions 6 and 7.

**C.**

Table 1 title says:

Table 1: Correlation between the subjects' scores on the SILL and SPLP at both levels

But there is no mention of the levels in the table!

Besides, there is a whole lot of repeated data in the table. SPSS output has been copied here.

This is also the case for Table 3 (and it is not obvious why the author says table 3-5). Before the table the writer says:

Regression analysis was used to check to what extent SPLP had predictability for the learners' use of learning strategies **at the two intermediate and advanced levels**. The results of this analysis and the calculated *t*-value are illustrated in tables 3-5.

**D.**

The Regression analyses results could be presented in a more precise way. The author can consult APA on how to report the results.

**E.**

On page 17, the author says:

Since the distributions were skewed and not normal, a *t*-test could not be run to check the difference between the groups and a Mann-Whitney test had to be utilized instead.

If this is the case, could the writer use Pearson correlation for the SILL scores?

**F.**

The RESULTS section should be rewritten and IMPLICATIONS should be presented in clear words. The four points mentioned are merely restatements of the results rather than implications.

# بررسی ارتباط میان استفاده از راهبردهای یادگیری زبان و مهارت زبانی خوداحساس

مونا خبیری

مهدیه اعظمی‌نژاد

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هدف این تحقیق بررسی رابطه بین استفاده زبان آموزان دو سطح متوسط و پیشرفته زبان انگلیسی از راهبردهای فراگیری زبان و خود-ارزیابی آنان از دانش زبان انگلیسی بوده است. شصت و هفت دانش آموز زبان انگلیسی (۳۹ دانش آموز سطح متوسط و ۲۸ دانش آموز سطح پیشرفته) بر مبنای نمره دریافتی در آزمون کلی سطح زبان انگلیسی برای شرکت در این تحقیق انتخاب شدند. آزمون فوق ابتدا یکبار به صورت آزمایشی با گروه مشابهی برگزار گردیده و مورد بازپیرایی قرار گرفته بود. زبان آموزان منتخب به دو پرسشنامه پاسخ دادند: یک پرسشنامه جهت انجام خود-ارزیابی سطح زبان انگلیسی و دیگری پرسشنامه سنجش میزان استفاده از راهبردهای فراگیری زبان انگلیسی. نتایج تحلیل آماری داده ها حاکی از وجود رابطه معنا درا بین دو متغیر در میان گروه زبان آموزان سطح پیشرفته بود، حال آنکه چنان رابطه ای میان گروه زبان آموزان سطح متوسط وجود نداشت. بنابراین نتایج نشان می دهد که هرچه زبان آموزان به سطوح بالاتر زبان ارتقا می یابند، توانایی بیشتری برای ارزیابی سطح زبان خود پیدا می کنند و نیز از راهبردهای فراگیری زبان نیز بیشتر استفاده می نمایند. همچنین نتایج حاکی از آن است که با ارتقای سطح زبان انگلیسی تغییری در رویکرد زبان آموزان نسبت به استفاده از راهبردهای فراگیری زبان رخ نمی دهد مگر در مورد راهکار حافظه ای و اجتماعی فراگیری زبان. نهایتا نتایج نشان می دهد که متداوترین راهکار فراگیری زبان در میان دو سطح متوسط و پیشرفته زبان آموزان راهکار شناختی بوده و زبان آموزان هر دو سطح از راهکار عاطفی کمتر از سایر راهکارها استفاده می کنند.

کلیدواژه‌ها: راهبردهای فراگیری زبان انگلیسی،
دانش زبانی، خود-ارزیابی، خود-ارزیابی دانش
زبانی