Top-Notch Learning Strategies among Kuwaiti EFL Learners

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Abstract

The present study attempts to locate, through O'Malley and Chamot's taxonomy (1990), the most successful FL learners. A total of 150 school learners completed a questionnaire containing eighty different strategies within the borders of Kuwait. The results of the end-of-semester assessments were evaluated and reviewed three months after the data collection process. The most informative output inspection led to the derivation of three categories: poor, average, and top. Results show that learners employ at least a combination of metacognitive, social-affective, and cognitive strategies in ways that are varied statistically according to skill level.

Keywords: un/successful language learners; metacognitive, cognitive & social affective strategies

1. Introduction

The definitions of strategy differ among researchers, making comparisons of results very difficult. Strategies assist students in learning, completing linguistic assignments, and recalling information (Chamot, 2005; Zainar et al., 2021). Sometimes, the subjectivity or lack of objectivity in FL learners' achievement markers prohibits comparisons. Indicators are needed to specify the strategies linked to "good/successful learners." The summary of the work below highlights these challenges and attempts to establish assumptions that limit successful language learners' strategies.

LLS are the deliberate plans and actions of a learner aimed at achieving their language learning goals. Strategies are defined as intentional behaviors or cognitive skills that facilitate the processes of understanding, learning, and remembering. They are categorized into three types: cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective. These strategies tend to be goal-directed and conscious. Some of the most widely recognized LLS include understanding, summarizing, remembering, retrieving, and using information in oral or written form. To meet students' needs, these strategies are constantly combined and manipulated in various ways (for example, Oxford, 1990; 1999; 2016). For the purpose of this study, LLS are defined as a learner's intentional thoughts and actions used to accomplish a learning activity in a specific situation.

Success within Kuwait's demanding educational system is tied to students' ability to pass necessary English classes. However, schools and institutions have repeatedly complained about low academic standards and students' overall inadequacy in learning English as a foreign language (Al-Mutawa & Al-Dabbous, 1997; Al-Edwani, 2005; Al-Darwish, 2017). Consequently, Kuwaiti secondary school students do not know how to acquire a new language. The MOE in Kuwait is trying to raise the level of language proficiency, but students are struggling with written assignments. The low level of academic performance and the poor understanding of language learning strategies at the secondary school level raise an alarming educational gap among students (Aldaihani et al., 2015; Al-Edwani, 2005; Almazeedi, 2009). The current competitive school system in the country focuses on passing the compulsory English course; however, on average, the high school graduate attains only the seventh intermediate academic level (The National Document Committee, 2007).

Strategy is the process by which one can gain knowledge and thus think profoundly. Nowadays, researchers have made observations in secondary schools in Kuwait and found that there are numerous problems pertinent to the language skills of the students. These problems may lead to poor success in learning English. According to Brown et al. (1983), Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) are important determinants of whether language acquisition has taken place because they enable students to take responsibility for the language and develop appropriate study habits. Kuwaiti students of a foreign language (FL) can use LLSs independently to develop their language skills in memorization, synthesis, and communication. It helps learners, in that sense, to become self-conscious regulators of their cognition—from learning styles to strategies and approaches.

This study attempts to identify those strategies that distinguish between students who turn out to be successful and those who do not within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. What types of strategies does a successful student seem to use more often than a less successful one? The present study seeks to answer precisely this question: which of the proposed strategies really facilitates the process of learning? It should be pointed out that all the steps mentioned above aimed to elaborate and confirm a questionnaire measuring the importance given to learning techniques in relation to other individual variables, such as motivation toward learning a foreign language.

If the results of this research are taken seriously, they may shed light on how to become successful language learners. Thus, when learners understand how language learning strategies (LLSs) contribute to success, they can make more enlightened choices regarding their practices. Indeed, this study can bring about a complete change in the way languages are taught and result in excellent student outcomes. The studies conducted may lead to more effective techniques and materials for teaching languages. Supervisors and teachers can use successful LLSs as a useful framework for developing English language teaching materials since LLSs offer learners creative opportunities to practice their language abilities while simultaneously providing feedback and self-reflection. In addition, when language acquisition is the target, LLSs facilitate learners' motivation and autonomous learning. The findings of this study would be useful for curriculum developers in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education while revising the development of EFL textbooks by addressing how to include these strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Literature

FL learning strategies have developed significantly from early research by Stern (1975), Weinstein (1978), and Wenden (1987) to recent studies by Oxford (2016), Wharton (2000), and Al-Khaza'leh (2020). Research into strategies has generated a multitude of typologies—for example, Al-Qahtani (2013). Connections have also been made between these various typologies and other characteristics such as motivation (Amir, 2018; Brown et al., 1983) and personal style (Chamot, 2005). For example, Ellis (1994) and Zare (2012) express that despite numerous studies conducted, our knowledge about strategies is still strikingly limited. Furthermore, Dawadi (2017) claims that specifying the tactics of successful FL learners is even more complicated than predicting the temperature in the future.

A literature review on FL methods goes back to Stern (1975), who is considered one of the pioneers in the subject. Stern compiled a list of attitudes, habits, and techniques that are believed to contribute to the success of FL learners. He focused on selecting the best procedures. By employing strategies such as interviewing and writing on the board, the author was able to identify some skills in which she could perceive meaning and some degree of control that she exercised over the work.

Stern (1975) focused on describing the successful language learner and noted that there is no single strategy of learning that would guarantee universal success. Successful language learners possess personal characteristics, styles, and strategies, such as finding their own way, organizing information, being creative, creating practice opportunities, learning to live with uncertainty, using memory strategies, making errors work for them, and using linguistic knowledge, including first language knowledge.

Oxford's taxonomy is the most comprehensive from 1990. The three direct language learning processes are memory, cognition, and compensatory processes. While memory strategies involve mentally processing the language, cognitive strategies involve managing the target language purposefully. Compensation mechanisms allow learners to practice the language despite deficiencies in their knowledge through intelligent guessing or overcoming limits. Indirect techniques support language acquisition. These strategies assist with organizing, focusing, assessing, seeking opportunities, lowering fear, and more. While cognitive strategies help students manage their thoughts, affective methods help regulate mood and provide motivation. Social strategies facilitate language learning. To evaluate language-learning strategies, researchers developed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).

A relationship between approaches and achievements was of interest to researchers. For instance, Rubin (1975) proposed a list of seven language learning strategies that included willing guessing, effective communication, making mistakes, looking for linguistic patterns, practicing, monitoring oneself and others, and paying attention to meaning. The taxonomy did not explore mental processes; it focused on observable behaviors. Later modifications of Rubin's taxonomy included both direct and indirect learning mechanisms. Whereas indirect learning strategies allow learning yet do not directly support it, direct learning strategies make a direct contribution to the learning process. This distinction has been replaced by Wenden's (1991) more global theory of self-management.

2.1.1 Previous Studies

Naiman et al. (1978) researched the strategies of effective language learners. They listed the following as the five most frequent approaches: "active task strategies, viewing language as a system, comprehending it as a vehicle of discourse and a linguistic perspective, managing emotional demands, and keeping tabs on second language performance." These findings support what has been called the communicative approach to language teaching, which is more functional than form-oriented. While the researchers represented North American adult language learners, the findings of the study had valid applications only when English was the dominant language in use.

Fillmore (1979) proposed a taxonomy that categorized language acquisition strategies as either social or cognitive in nature. Through observation of five Mexican students in an English-speaking school in California, she identified two categories of practical strategies: social strategies, which involved being in a group and acting, and cognitive strategies, which involved inferring what learners say in a given situation. Since Fillmore's classification analyzed invisible mental processes using cognitive methods, it was more precise than that of Rubin (1975). Data were collected by interpreting the audio recordings and tapes made by the researcher.

For Sternberg (1983), learning strategies may be executive or non-executive. The former includes problem identification, resource allocation, monitoring, and feedback translation. The latter, however, encompasses encoding, inferencing, mapping, application, and justification. Another categorization classifies learning strategies as cognitive tasks and the processes of planning, monitoring, correcting, and refining learning. In language learning, foreign language acquisition employs cognitive strategies, while social strategies relate to the social activities associated with acquiring a second or foreign language.

The taxonomy for Asians and Latinos enrolled in intensive eight-week ESL courses was developed by Politzer and McGroarty (1985) based on questionnaires associated with language learning behavior. The participants were aged between 23 and 47 years. The researchers measured the improvement in their communication, grammar, and listening skills. The results of the study showed that the language learning strategies employed by learners from different cultural backgrounds were numerous; social tactics were the only strategies significantly related to gain scores. It was also established that cultural factors influence learning strategies; therefore, learners of different nationalities differ in the strategies they use. The classification schemes utilized in studies classified social activities as language learning, highlighting a number of learning behaviors. The connection between all these social processes studied in the past and foreign language learning strategies is, however, not well established.

In 1985, O'Malley et al. suggested a taxonomy of language learning strategies related to psychological issues and self-awareness. They proposed the use of metacognitive strategies, which included processes of self-awareness. O'Malley et al. divided them into three groups: cognitive, social, and metacognitive. Oxford's research suggested six groups: affective strategies, social strategies, metacognitive strategies, and cognitive strategies. The research included social mediation and metacognitive strategies.

Wenden (1987) distinguished language learning strategies as either self-management strategies, involving the organization, supervision, and evaluation of the learning process, or cognitive strategies, relating to the selection, understanding, storage, and retrieval of information. Metacognitive strategy use in one L2 writing study was found to be actively planned, evaluated, and monitored by the learners; however, syntactical errors and underdeveloped ideas appeared in their writing. While such strategies were implemented, the study did not focus on how these strategies affected speaking, listening, and reading, but rather how they impacted writing.

Oxford and Nyikos (1989) presented the psychological angle of the processes of language learning. In their research, there were 1,200 American students learning a foreign language. They identified two kinds of strategies: indirect strategies, which include expressive, social, and metacognitive strategies, while direct strategies include memory, cognitive, and compensatory strategies. Indeed, the results showed that factors such as gender, academic background, field, and status of candidacy were the most significant variables whereby the individual differences in the approaches to language acquisition became distinguishable. Motivation has divided the ways in which the strategies are used: more motivation means more frequent and competent use. The relationship obtained here testifies to the possibility that self-assessment as a linguist can create conditions, even motives, for strategy use that have already been discussed.

In their study of ESL learners from varied ethnic backgrounds, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) reported selective attention as a metacognitive strategy. Other metacognitive strategies included task organization, monitoring focus, comprehension, and assessment. The cognitive strategies utilized included rehearsal, organization, inferencing, summarizing, deducing, imagery, transfer, and elaboration. In social mediation, the strategies employed included cooperating with fellow language learners to get feedback, asking questions, and self-talk. Although these strategies were adopted by successful language learners, the study did not indicate which ones were more useful than others.

Wharton (2000) utilized the SILL to determine 80 language learning strategies. He divided learners into good, average, and poor categories. Thirty-five strategies differentiated successful and unsuccessful learners. Successful learners used word integration to memorize items. Slowing down and repeating, along with interviewing the interlocutor, are examples of social strategies. The metacognitive strategies include organizing a work schedule and management tactics. Generally, these tactics help in retaining information.

Geramia and Baighloub (2011) investigated memory, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Iranian learners of the English language were compared based on the strategies they used and did not use in their learning process. This will help Iranian language teachers understand the gap that exists between the strategies that learners employ and the methods they use for teaching.

Sari Sofyan and Hati (2018) explored the types of language learning strategies adopted by successful university students at Bengkulu. Some of the strategies involved memory, cognition, metacognitive, affective, compensatory, and social strategies. The data obtained from the questionnaire were tabulated using Microsoft Excel 2013. The metacognitive strategies employed by the students in their studies were recorded at an average score of 3.94. Metacognitive strategy is one of the determining variables in academic achievement, which helps learners develop appropriate management and thinking styles. The lowest alternative was chosen primarily because of curriculum influence, improved technology access, and the unpredictable emotions and attitudes of learners.

Daflizar, Sulistiyo, and Kamil (2022) used the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning from Oxford, along with some additional questions by Chan et al., to investigate 76 Indonesian university students majoring in ESL context about their independence and methods of learning the language. It appeared that metacognitive strategies were used extensively, supplemented by a considerable number of memory, cognitive, emotional, and compensatory strategies, as well as social skills. Independent learning was characterized by active learners both in and out of the classroom and a positive perception of their ability to learn.

Naiman et al. identified five common strategies after re-examining previous studies that could assist in addressing the research gaps in the current study: active task, language as a system, discourse vehicle, emotional needs management, and second language performance monitoring. In Fillmore's taxonomy, strategies were categorized into two types: social and cognitive. In Sternberg's classification of learning strategies, strategies were categorized into executive and non-executive categories. For the cultural learner, Politzer and McGroarty's taxonomy was developed. For second language learning, O'Malley et al.'s taxonomy focused more on (1) metacognitive techniques, (2) cognitive strategies, and (3) socioaffective strategies. Students can study more independently and autonomously if they are encouraged to be self-reliant and confident. Self-efficacy and motivation increase when more strategies are utilized. By examining the current situation, the current study establishes idealized learning strategies.

This present study, therefore, attempts to fill this important knowledge gap in how O'Malley and Chamot's taxonomy of language learning strategies (1990) can be applied in the Kuwaiti context. Hence, it focuses on the EFL learner in Kuwait and reveals the most helpful strategies used by successful learners. The current study provides detailed empirical data regarding the Kuwaiti educational and cultural context through an 80-item questionnaire covering metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective domains. The goal of this study is to complete this research gap by providing information on how these strategies are actually employed and change along with learners' skill levels. This study demonstrates how the conceptual framework of O'Malley and Chamot's taxonomy aligns with actual EFL learning realities in Kuwait, thereby giving deeper meaning to the Strategic Language Learning Approach and opening the door for more specific educational interventions.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The research design used in this study was descriptive. This study assigned four English teachers of foreign languages to thirteen different classes at three schools in Kuwait. The same thirteen classes were assigned to the four teachers. The participants, fifth-grade students, averaged sixteen years old and voluntarily participated in answering the questionnaire. A total of 150 participants were included. This is the pre-final stage before entering college and thus occurs in the fifth year of the secondary stage. Permission from the English language department had to be obtained first to gain entry to the secondary school classrooms in the three schools under study. More than 95% stated that both their mother and father spoke Arabic, which was their mother tongue. All reported having received English education for a total of eight years, commencing in their fourth year of primary school.

The strategy questionnaire was administered in March 2024. Based on O'Malley et al.'s (1989) categories, the questionnaire provided various strategies for language problems. These included cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social-affective strategies. No learning exercises were provided in advance. The participants were duly informed about the purpose of the study, and assurance of confidentiality was given regarding the obtained data. They were also required to sign their own copies to cross-check at later dates with their official academic records.

3.2 Instrument

This This is an exploratory study because the sample is divided randomly and relies on a single measure, language production, rather than multiple measures. All of the strategies in the questionnaire are analyzed. Confronted with the confusion arising from the contribution of work based on different definitions of the central notion of "strategy," there seemed to be no other way than to examine one by one the contributions of strategies drawn from a typology, that of O'Malley and his collaborators (1989). Their work thus served as inspiration for the development of the strategy questionnaire in this study. Its content was first appraised by three professors at the University of Kuwait and then administered to 12 secondary learners. A somewhat longer version of the questionnaire, constructed to collect written responses from volunteers, determined which of those strategies were superfluous, irrelevant, or duplicated, and also called for changes in the formulation of the statements and directions. The final questionnaire has 80 learning strategies.

For the frequency of use, the answers were obtained using a four-point Likert scale: 1 (never), 2 (a few times), 3 (frequently), and 4 (often). A high score means that the involved strategy is used regularly. The three categories of strategies that this questionnaire distinguished include cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective. There are 35 metacognitive strategies.

This category groups together planning strategies, which include strategies of prior organization (five items; 81), attention (four items; 77), and management (four items; 72), as well as strategies of control or monitoring (fifteen items; 86) and evaluation (seven items; 81). These strategies address various aspects of learning and help explain the large number of control strategies. Among the 15 strategies of the present study, two strategies involve deciding on which work is to be done before the work gets started, such as "I identify the task to be completed" or "I determine what I must do." Additionally, four more strategies involve understanding, communicating well, ensuring that the plan of a certain activity goes well, and using such strategies while performing, for example, while speaking, writing, or reading. After that, I perform two other control strategies, such as rereading my work. Finally, three strategies concern quality control, whereby I assess the suitability of my use of a newly encountered word, and they also draw on previously employed methods, such as reviewing the strategies used so far.

In conclusion, at the end of the study, five of the control strategies emerge as significant. Cognitive strategies comprise 29 items, divided into four scales: resource management strategies (4 items; 73), summary and note-taking (three items; 65), comprehension (eight items; 58), and memorization (fourteen items; 83). Memorization strategies include repetition, regrouping, association, elaboration, and finally, the use of imaging and auditory representation.

Socio-affective strategies include sixteen items subdivided according to whether they are cooperation strategies (seven items; 79), clarification strategies (six items; 84), or affective strategies (three items; 44). The Cronbach alpha coefficients for each scale indicate a relatively satisfactory level of consistency; one must keep in mind, however, that the present study focuses on the identification of discriminatory strategies, irrespective of their scale of membership.

The measures to estimate success in foreign languages come from the milestone review accord by consulting the school records, one relating to language production and the other to understanding. These tests were produced by the teachers according to instructions set out by the ministry program. The ministry also furnishes an evaluation grid with a weighting of the various elements that make up the test. The

language production test consists of two parts: one oral, where four learners are asked to discuss a topic drawn at random in sub-groups, and another written, where only a pre-set number of words is marked; for example, only the first 150 words.

3.3 Data Analysis

The sample was divided between the comprehension measure, which had a somewhat better performance (M = 70.9%, SD = 21.82), while the language production measure was considered more discriminating (M = 62.4%, SD = 21.01). Learners who scored between 60% and 79% (Gr2; n = 141) were classified as average; learners scoring between 80% and 100% (Gr3; n = 55) were classified as successful, while learners scoring equal to or less than 59% (Gr1; n = 114) were classified as low.

A nested two-factor analysis of variance was completed to confirm that the participants' scores did not significantly differ based on either their teacher or the class they originated from (see Table 1). The results of this study indicate there is no difference among the participants based on being from one of the four participating professors or one of the 13 cooperating courses. Therefore, the findings of this milestone review are not controlled.

Table 1. Results of the analysis for the language production test (*N* = 150)

Source	DL	Sum of squares	Value of F	Pr > *F*
teachers	3	1036.829358	0.77	0.5074
classes	9	1471.870273	0.33	0.9708
Error	297	143038.9637		
teachers	Adjusted mean			
		error standard		
	I	58.01	3.09	
	Ii	67.27	3.70	
	Iii	60.84	2.92	
	Iv	63.17	1.73	
Classes (teachers)				
	A	59.01	4.76	
	A	61.01	4.910	
	B	68.95	3.820	
	B	67.81	4.330	
	B	62.02	9.381	
	C	64.22	4.721	
	C	59.66	3.250	
	D	66.22	4.830	
	D	58.58	4.830	
	D	64.81	3.630	
	D	64.22	4. 902	
	D	63.38	3.717	
	D	57.66	3.902	

A Kruskal-Wallis analysis was conducted to assess which of the 80 tactics were reported to be utilized more frequently by any of the subgroups: unsuccessful (Gr1), medium (Gr2), or successful (Gr3). The probability criterion was set at 0.05, which is the universally accepted threshold in statistics. This coefficient correction, implemented in part due to the exploratory nature of the study, prevents the build-up of Type I measurement errors when numerous comparisons are performed.

4. Findings

Based on the skill levels (Gr1, Gr2, and Gr3), the Kruskal-Wallis analysis found 13 strategies used differently. Of the 13 strategies, eight are metacognitive, four are cognitive, and one is socio-affective. These strategies are described in their respective categories, beginning with metacognitive strategies.

4.1 Metacognitive Strategies

As previously stated, the metacognitive category includes 33 strategies, eight of which have considerable variance. Three of these include planning strategies, specifically attention strategies. The last five are control strategies. Similarly, these findings indicate that no organizational, management, or evaluation strategy distinguishes between successful and unsuccessful learners. Consider some of the data obtained (Table 2).

Table 2. Top-notch metacognitive strategies per class level

F value	***P***	**3 / 2**	**3 /1**	**2 / 1**	**3**	**2**
In the English class, I pay attention to what is taught (st 25)						
7.62	0.0006	0.08 <0.0003	0.0077	3.138(.10)	2.94 (.07)	2.82 (.06)
When the teacher speaks in English, I concentrate on what he/she is saying. (st 29)						

11.70	0.0000	0.0018 < 0.0002	0.0123	3.37 (.11	3.12 (.07)	2.81(.08)

During a listening activity, I focus on what helps me understand the meaning and answer the questions that will be asked. (st 58)1

16.63	0.0000	0.10 ns	0.0001 < 0.0001	3.28(.10)	3.19 (.07)	2.88 (.07)

For a job, an assignment or an exercise, in order to complete the assignment, I have ascertained precisely what actions are required. successfully. (st28) (control; before) 8.94

8.93	0.0001	0.0036< 0.0002	0.05 ns	3.26	2.8 6 (.08)	2.68 (.08)

When I speak or write in English, I take care to make myself understood. (st 77) (control; during)

16.65	0.0000	0.0005	0.0002 <0.0033	3.68 (.08)	3.31 (.06)	2.84 (.07)

When I speak or write, I replace one word or phrase with another if I am not satisfied with the choice I made. (st 16) (control; during)

10.33	0.0001	0.0005	0.0002 <0.0033	3.08 (.09)	2.78 (.07)	2.54 (.08)

Once I have finished my work, I check it by reviewing especially the places that have posed difficulties. (st 15) (control; after)

7.62	0.0005	0.0371	0.0001 <0.0385	3.08 (.12)	2.86 (.08)	2.61 (.09)

I reread my work and change, when necessary, my sentences so that they are written more in the English style. (st 20) (control; after)

9.80	0.0002	0.0001	0.0001 <0.48ns	2.82 (.13)	2.31 (.07)	2.41 (.08)

Of the four attention strategies included in the questionnaire, three were found to be used significantly differently among the subgroups formed from the FL production measurement. Thus, paying attention to what is taught (s25) yields an F value of 7.62 with a threshold of 0.05, indicating the existence of observed significant differences. The examination of the probability value thresholds resulting from the inter-group comparison (between groups 3 and 2, 3 and 1, and finally between 2 and 1) indicates the source of these differences. The thresholds reported in Table 2 demonstrate a significant difference between successful and unsuccessful learners (Gr3/Gr1: $p = 0.0003$) as well as between medium and unsuccessful learners (Gr2/Gr1: $p = 0.0077$).

The average scores from the Likert scale confirm that it is the learners considered successful in FL who report making more frequent use of this strategy compared to less successful learners. Thus, successful learners (Gr3) say they often use this strategy (M: 3.138; ET: 0.10), as do average learners (Gr2: M: 2.92; ET: 0.07), compared to unsuccessful learners (Class 1: Mean: 2.83; ET: 0.006). Regarding the other strategies, they are similar in their ability to focus during a listening activity (s58), particularly when the degree of probability falls below the set threshold (F: 16.63; $p = 0.0000$). This strategy also distinguishes groups 3 and 1 ($p < 0.0001$) as well as 2 and 1 ($p < 0.0001$). In terms of focusing on what the teacher is saying (s29), the thresholds indicate a significant difference between each of the three groupings (Gr3 > Gr2; Gr3 > Gr1; Gr2 > Gr1). In all cases, the averages indicate that those who report frequent use of this strategy are the most successful (Table 2).

These three strategies, all significant, differ from the single non-significant attention strategy, whose formulation targets a more specific dimension of the language course. In fact, it addresses the attention given to *how the teacher pronounces certain words* (ST 49). Furthermore, this strategy refers to a form of planned attention (I decide in advance, etc.). From this point of view, it recalls the strategies of prior organizations, of which none are significant, during or after the completion of a task.

In addition, metacognitive strategies bring together 15 control strategies, five of which are significant. First, learners employ this strategy (s28) more frequently than the means (G3 > G2) and more frequently than the unsuccessful (G3 > G1) (see Table 2). It is importants to note that this strategy distinguishes the strong (G3) from the other two subgroups, medium and unsuccessful learners. Furthermore, the sole alternative strategy, which focuses on the work required to accomplish a task (i.e., identifying the necessary steps for job success; s22), fails to meet the materiality threshold.

Two control strategies that apply substantially differently across all learner groups are substituting a word or phrase (s16) and ensuring one's own understanding when speaking or writing (s77) (Gr3 > Gr2; Gr3 > Gr1; Gr2 > Gr1). Both of these strategies share language production with a strategy for identifying speaking errors (s65). This last strategy is, like the two previous strategies of control during the execution of tasks, meaningless.

The last two control strategies, used in a very different manner, correspond to the two methods that apply once the task is completed. The process involves verifying the work by scrutinizing the areas that presented challenges (s15), followed by a proofreading process that results in a rewrite to enhance the English style (s20). The successful learner uses these strategies more often than the average learner does (Gr3 > Gr2) and more often than the unsuccessful learner (Gr3 > Gr1). Moreover, only the reading of the areas that produced difficulties (s15) presents a significant difference between the average learners and the unsuccessful ones (Gr2 > Gr1). These results show two interesting aspects. On one hand, this seems logical: only successful learners possess enough knowledge of a foreign language (FL) to attempt to adopt the style; on the other hand, it is possible that the unsuccessful learners fail to correctly identify the areas that are problematic, which may be the reason for their not feeling the need to review the content.

All other control strategies, such as checking the appearance of a word to know its quality (s9), saying a word out loud to check its writing style (s44), or thinking about the appropriate use of a newly learned word or phrase (s43), are non-significant. These quality verification strategies do indeed resemble a number of "tricks" and are relatively specific, which may account for their lack of discrimination. To conclude, consider this strategy, which is not exclusive to proficient learners but rather encourages re-evaluating previous strategies to determine their effectiveness for the task at hand (s38).

4.2 Cognitive Strategies

The findings reveal that the participants apply two comprehension strategies and two memorization strategies differently based on their proficiency in the production test. It becomes apparent that the other cognitive strategies—taking notes, summarizing, and managing resources—are not relevant (see Table 3).

Table 3. Top-notch cognitive strategies per class level

F value	***P***	**3 / 2**	**3 /1**	**2 / 1**	**3**	**2**
Reading a text or listening to a conversation, I sense the gist of a novel term by setting. (st 23) (infer)						
9.67	0.0001	0.0072	0.0002	0.0316	3.26 (.07)	3.02 (.07)
I apply the grammar rules I have learned to new situations (e.g., for present tense verbs, I know the ending “s” of the 3rd pers. of sing. [he eats] and I apply it to other verbs). (st 27) (deduct)						
12.91	0.0001	0.0038	0.0000	0.0046	3.22 (.10)	2.81 (.08)
I imitate the way English speakers express themselves in order to reproduce as faithfully as possible the pronunciation of the English language. (st 40) (imitation)						
9.61	0.0002	0.0002	0.0007	0.57ns 2.87 (.11)	2.44 (.08)	2.23 (.10)
I elaborate English words or phrases that I already know to build more elaborate sentences. (st 51) (elaboration)						
12.61	0.0001	0.0000	0.52ns	3.23 (.10)	2.78 (.06)	2.63 (.07)

The two most prominent of the seven comprehension strategies are the ability to guess or infer what a vocabulary item means by its context (s. 23) and the ability to deduce or use one's comprehension of a grammatical rule by providing examples of its use (s. 27). The results show significant observed differences in the practice of these strategies across all learner groups: Gr3 > Gr2; Gr3 > Gr1; Gr2 > Gr1. Curiously enough, three other understanding strategies are, for the most part, nonsignificant, and all three deal with the ability to induce, i.e., to form a hypothesis or draw a conclusion from known data. In language, induction refers to the formulation of a grammar rule from examples showing its use. The fact that one works out rules for oneself (s. 7), uses one's own way of understanding the language (s. 41), or looks at a word in a sentence and tries to learn from it how to use it (s. 37) makes one no better or worse a learner than someone else.

The authors elaborated on two comprehension strategies that include the use of L1 (i.e., Arabic), thus approximating translation methods. In fact, the learner was required to declare whether he used his mother tongue to help him grasp or apply the laws of the English language (s. 4) or to understand English in general (s. 73). The results for these two strategies are not significant. Finally, the idea of "translating" a text or conversation into one's own words represents another non-significant comprehension strategy (s. 19). Of course, this is not an operation involving the use of one's first language, but rather an attempt to comprehend the overall meaning.

The two other cognitive strategies that are significant include one that is repetition-based memorization or imitation. Indeed, successful language students are more likely to use the strategy of trying to imitate the way English speakers express themselves (s. 40) than average learners (Gr3 > Gr2) or unsuccessful learners (Gr3 > Gr1). There is no difference between average and unsuccessful learners (Gr2 and Gr1). Consequently, only the most successful learners would have this characteristic (Gr3). Two other repetition (or imitation) strategies are also represented in the questionnaire but do not seem to distinguish good learners from bad ones: repeating or rewriting a word to memorize it better or to improve pronunciation (s. 11), and practicing by repeating phrases or expressions (s. 52).

Two more cognitive strategies seem to be relevant. Included under this are memorization techniques that involve mimicry or repetition. In practice, good language learners use this strategy more than average learners (Gr3 > Gr2) and unsuccessful learners (Gr3 > Gr1) because they try to imitate how speakers of English say things (s. 40). Note that there is no distinction between unsuccessful and average learners

(Gr2 and Gr1). Consequently, only the most advanced learners would possess this quality (Gr3). Two additional strategies of repetition (or imitation) that do not appear to distinguish between good and bad learners were included in the questionnaire: repeating or rewriting a word to enhance pronunciation or help with memory (s. 11) and practicing by repeating phrases or expressions (s. 52).

4.3 Socio-affective Strategies

In this category, there is only one of the 16 strategies that does not use a similar approach. This is one of six clarifying strategies, s 33, Table 4. Data indicate that the successful learners, Gr1, ask for the teacher's explanation more often than the unsuccessful learners, Gr1. The comparison is also valid between the means of Gr2 and the unsuccessful learners in Gr1. The lack of a significant observed difference between the average learners (Gr2) and successful learners (Gr3) makes the subgroup of unsuccessful learners an isolate compared to the rest of the participants.

Table 4. Top-notch social-affective strategies per class level

F value	***P***	**3 / 2**	**3 /1**	**2 / 1**	**3**	**2**
When I do not understand something about the subject being taught, I ask the teacher for explanations. (st33) (clarification)						
8.42	0.0000	0.16 ns 0.0000	0.0000	3.19 (.11)	2.84(.07)	2.68 (.07)

Other strategies, including cooperative strategies that frequently involve peers or affective strategies like rewarding oneself, do not prove to be significant. Surprisingly, the results reveal that proficient learners utilize all seven cooperation strategies, while struggling learners rely on a handful of socio-affective strategies more frequently. However, it's important to note that these are merely trends and the observed differences are not significant.

5. Discussion

At first glance, the results obtained tend to diminish the importance of learning strategies. However, it is important to continually bear in mind two aspects: in the first series of investigations, with 80 distinct strategies, the statistical significance level was 0.05. Since the investigation was exploratory in nature, this cautious procedure was inevitable. The terms "successful" and "unsuccessful" could be interpreted as giving strategies greater emphasis than they are given in the current study. Dörnyei (2005) has also criticized the SILL research instrument for using Likert scales to measure learners' use of strategies and behaviors. Dörnyei claims that the validity of total scale scores is in question and that behavioral items are insufficient for evaluating latent components.

Moreover, the analysis ranks the findings according to the strategies studied. A factorial study would have enabled the recognition of sets of strategies for comparison. Scholars sometimes refer to these groups as constituting the learner's "trends." For example, White et al. (2007) claim that this type of analysis reconciles the strategies defining the successful learner with the learner's mental demonstration. Could it be said that if teachers had instituted a certain measure for a foreign language task, a positive correlation between the measure and the grouping would definitively prove that the combination of these strategies sets a successful learner apart from an unsuccessful one? (Cohen, 2012). These findings indicate the need for further research.

The strategies for FL learning have been researched in numerous studies. According to scholars such as O'Malley & Chamot (1990), Sari, Sofyan & Hati (2019), Oxford (1990), and Geramia & Baighloub (2011), "There is a need to determine the ways in which successful and unsuccessful learners can be clearly distinguished." Only a few studies have been able to establish a relationship between certain strategies and various measures of independent variables, similar to Dörnyei (2005). However, more recent work has utilized analytical approaches to test each of the tactics considered here (Cohen, 2012).

Although discriminating strategies are rare in the results of the current study, they do have important theoretical and practical implications. Three decisive attention strategies were recognized in the current study among the metacognitive strategies investigated: paying attention to the teacher's instructions, paying attention to what the teacher is saying, and paying attention to what facilitates comprehension of the oral text. According to O'Malley & Chamot (1989), remembering begins with paying attention.

These findings suggest that a good learner might be more attentive while reading a text, reading an explanation, or listening to the teacher's explanations. In continued research on strategies, it would be important to identify other learning moments to see whether the task determines the amount of attention or whether attention is a characteristic of a good learner regardless of the teaching event. Furthermore, it should be underlined that some researchers view attention as part of motivation itself (Zainar et al., 2021). In this line, research could also test the design association between motivation and attention.

Other five metacognitive strategies were found to be significant, namely, control strategies relating to the identification of tasks associated with a job, the concept of being understood, and the proof of a job after it has been done. The first aspect of these strategies relates to the instant of application. These strategies refer to actions taken before, during, or after completing a task in the real world. Similarly, Tavakoli (2018) suggested that the detection of control processes be made both during the execution of a task—in online—and after its completion—post. However, further examinations then showed that the ability to evaluate gave one-dimensional results on metacognition. Indeed, this study assumes that a good learner always monitors his or her skills, resources, degree of competence, the task, or the means to carry it out.

These results from the current study show that a successful learner may well be one who also constantly exerts control over the task at all times in any manner: by controlling the means used, comprehending, and making oneself understood. Future research should endeavor to elucidate the distinction between the concept of evaluation, which entails a value judgment in relation to a specific scale (e.g., "Am I performing this correctly?"). The ability to direct one's actions implies a "presence" (e.g., "I will now examine my plan").

The most surprising results of the present study probably concern memory strategies. Of the fifteen memorizing procedures, only two differentiated effective learners from unsuccessful ones. Such results are also pointed out by Bremner (1999) in the case of Chinese language learners. Bremner notices that the SILL's memorization techniques did not correlate with the participants' competency, which he explains by cultural differences. The present study does not discriminate against learners who have accrued several years of FL study in memorizing strategies. Future research should use much younger learners. However, with respect to the memorizing strategies, those that attempt to construct longer phrases, Bremner applied a word in several contexts. Although Bremner points out the limited nature of this approach, further research is needed to understand the effective learner's motivation for putting words together to form longer, more complex sentences. Is it to practice for a test? Is it for personal satisfaction, or is it to memorize language elements? Data in this area could enhance our understanding of the functions of strategies.

A final significant revealing result is to be highlighted: the appeal more frequent by successful learners to only one of the 16 socio-affective strategies under the clarification strategies. Recall that O'Malley and his collaborators (1985) introduced this category of strategies in response to the comments they received during the retrospective interviews. Socioaffective strategies, however, do not fit into the theory of information processing proposed by Anderson (1983). Following an extensive review of the literature, Oxford (1990) has combined strategies of this type in his measuring instrument. Curiously enough, Bremner (1999), who also uses the Oxford instrument, observes an inverse relationship. In fact, the worst learners report using the SILL's emotional strategies more frequently, such as, "If I'm nervous about using FL, I try to calm down and push myself to express myself, even if it scares me." Consequently, there are no specific "strategies" here that facilitate learning.

The ability to recognize a misunderstanding and then communicate it to the teacher could be the difference between these strategies and the clarification strategy our study highlighted. It may be that the struggling learner does not fully realize their misunderstanding or, worse yet, does not really seek to understand. Another surprising outcome is the absence of significant differences in metacognitive organizational and management strategies. These strategies, admittedly, address somewhat abstract aspects such as the use of a plan, planning the necessary means, and using conditions to enhance learning. Yet, it must be emphasized that these strategies do not directly affect the performance of a learner but rather the ability of the latter to focus on and manage his or her tasks. Recall that in the study by Tavakoli (2018), he was able to establish evidence for a cause-and-effect relationship between metacognition—as would be understood here by evaluation alone—and some of the cognitive strategies. The remainder of this work should consider using more complex analytical methods to confirm the measurement scales of an improved version of the questionnaire, as well as the relationship between the strategies studied.

The current study indicated that the most striking variance in success for Kuwaiti language learners can be attributed to their implementation of the O'Malley and Chamot learning strategies. Successful learners make use of the language in every aspect of their lives and exploit any opportunity to practice it outside the classroom. Unsuccessful learners usually fail to plan strategically and also miss opportunities for constructive feedback. Another important characteristic is consistency and cultural immersion. Successful Kuwaiti learners practice the culture of the target language through media or interaction with a speaker of the target language habitually, while unsuccessful learners focus mainly on grammar and vocabulary and their use in practical life. These effective methods can definitely bring about tremendous improvement in Kuwaiti students' language acquisition.

6. Conclusions

Strategies remain a significant concern for language learners' success. Understanding this issue, as well as the other variables identified so far, is critical to comprehending its full scope. In conclusion, language learning strategies are crucial in facilitating the successful acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information in language learning. By understanding and implementing these strategies, learners can become actively involved in their own learning processes and achieve their learning goals.

The present study aims to identify ways through which successful FL learners can be differentiated from unsuccessful ones. The findings in the study determined the selection of participants into high, medium, and low groups. Data was obtained using a money questionnaire. Eighty strategies based on O'Malley et al.'s (1989) taxonomy indicated that thirteen, or sixteen percent, were used differently depending on the participants' proficiency levels. It identified the most useful strategies—particularly metacognitive and cognitive ones—and related them to each other in order to describe the approach of a successful learner in a coherent way.

A successful language learner employs appropriate strategies for effective acquisition. This research determined that these strategies enable students to acquire, store, and retrieve knowledge. Successful language learning strategies can be categorized in several ways. This research verifies O'Malley et al.'s (1989) findings; since language learning strategies differ due to individuality and diversity, they are highly dependent on the individual, especially when teaching a number of students at the same time. O'Malley et al. and Kellerman et al. (1989) differentiated LLS into cognitive, metacognitive, and affective strategies.

The Kuwaiti EFL students employed three different language learning strategies categorized into three sets: 1) cognitive, comprising two for comprehension and two for memorization; 2) socio-affective, comprising only one for clarifying techniques; and 3) metacognitive,

comprising three for attention and five for control. Affective strategies were the least used, while the number of years learning English did not directly impact the choice of these strategies.

In contrast to metacognitive and cognitive strategies, this study has found that Kuwaiti students are underutilizing affective strategies, which deal with motivation, emotions, and anxiety. The possible reasons for such underutilization could be examination-oriented instruction or cultural factors. Explicit instruction in stress management techniques may better equip learners to cope with language acquisition difficulties. Affective tactics are vital for developing learner autonomy and resilience. Successful learners employ a dynamic mixture of cognitive, socio-affective, and metacognitive techniques depending on their ability levels. The present study suggests differentiated instruction while underlining the critical role of language learning strategies (LLS) for optimal learning. Affective strategy training should be added to the curriculum of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs in Kuwait to address the underutilization observed among the respondents through the promotion of stress management and emotional awareness. Further research should investigate cultural and educational settings.

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Authors' contributions

The authors made significant contributions to the conception and design of the work. The first author carried out the textual analysis. The second author was responsible for the study design. Prof. Al-Jamal drafted the manuscript Also, the three authors contributed to the interpretation of the gathered data. All authors edited, proofread and revised the work critically for important intellectual content based on the editor and reviewer‟s comments. All authors approved of the final version the final manuscript.

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