Exploring the Use of Language Learning Strategies in the Albanian Context

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Abstract—**In contrast to the plethora of studies exploring language learning strategies, the Albanian foreign language learning context has been little investigated since the focus has been generally placed on the approaches and methods that teachers use in the classroom. Therefore, this paper intends to identify the learning strategies among Albanian students who study English as a foreign language and find out whether the introduction of a fully informed or overt strategy instruction in the learning context can make a difference. The aim of the research is twofold: (1) to investigate the use of learning strategies and discover variation in terms of grade level and gender, and (2) to include research results in the modules of professional development training and foreign language methodology units so that pre-service and in-service teachers are introduced to the learning strategies that students are most likely to employ when learning a foreign language. The data analysis in this study is carried out using the six categories classification by Rebecca Oxford (1990), and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire is employed for data collection. However, the study not only intends to make some claims concerning learning strategies, but it also aims to ultimately use its results to update the teacher training materials and the relevant modules.**

Index Terms—**language learning strategies, overt instruction, self-directed learning, foreign language learning strategies**

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of language learning strategies in the Albanian context is relatively new and an area with very little research the focus of which has been mostly put on the strategies that teachers use in the classroom. Thus, the aim of this article is to explore the Language Learning Strategies (LLS) that Albanian students employ in the process of learning a foreign language and at what scale they are being used to promote learners' autonomy, self-regulation, and self-direction. The overarching goal of this research is to use its findings as the basis for the training of pre-service teachers, with the hope that some interventions will be introduced and implemented within the Albanian education system. LLS are ways to make the learning of language easier and more effective (Alhaisoni, 2012) and the effective use of LLS helps students become successful learners of a foreign language (Radwan, 2011). It is of great importance to focus on how students process the received knowledge or information, and what kind of strategies they employ to understand, learn, or remember the information (Bessai, 2018).

The Albanian students rely heavily on the teacher as the source of information and learning and they struggle with self-directed or self-regulated learning. Therefore, one of the objectives of this study is to investigate whether there is a pattern of fully informed or overt strategy instruction in the Albanian context, and if it can make a difference. Oxford & Gkonou (2018) state that the overt or informed strategy instruction involves several steps, such as finding out what are the current learning strategies, choosing new or several strategies that students may need for current tasks, demonstrating and naming the strategy for the students and explaining why it is helpful, asking the students to try the strategy on an authentic task and show how useful it was while reminding them to use it again or transfer that strategy to a new task. However, it should be noted that learning strategies are not equally effective in all contexts of learning or throughout the learning strategies (Bessai, 2018). The informed strategy instruction would make students own the learning process and self-regulate or self-direct their learning according to their own level of proficiency or needs, in addition to making their learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable (Oxford, 1990).

However, learning strategies do not apply for any cultural context, or for all the language learners and learning contexts equally the same. Learning strategies may also vary depending on whether the target language skill is writing,

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reading, grammar or speaking. Hence, in an attempt to place the students at the centre of the learning process with the ultimate aim of making them autonomous learners and owners of their learning, this paper seeks to identify the learning strategies that students employ while they are learning a foreign language; ascertain whether there is a variation in strategic learning between the additional languages they might be studying (e.g. L2, L3), or in age group and gender; explore whether students are aware of the language learning strategies, and how we can direct their learning towards the use of the desired strategies to enable them to be responsible for their learning process (Khan, 2011). Our goal is to simulate the usual appearance of papers in a journal of the Academy Publication. We are requesting that you follow these guidelines as closely as possible.

II. RESEARCH CONTENT

A. Research Questions

The research questions aimed at being answered in this study are as follows:
1. Is there a general pattern of language learning strategy use among Albanian EFL learners?
2. Is there a variation in the use of the learning strategies due to grade level or gender?
3. Does a fully informed or overt strategy instruction in the learning context facilitate the least used strategies?

The research will also focus on the degree that these strategies are used or explored and whether there is a variation due to gender or age.

B. Literature Review

The research on learning strategies has expanded to include other essential issues such as the use of strategies for learning culture in a second or foreign language, the employment of LLS in technology-mediated language learning, the link among strategies, self-directed learning, self-regulation, and autonomy. The current and future research aims to address concerns arising from the use of the data collection tools, such as Oxford's Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) and whether other variables, including willingness to communicate, learning styles, motivation, aptitude etc., are also taken into consideration during any research on learning strategies (Pawlak & Oxford, 2018).

Pawlak & Oxford (2018) state that research in LLS has grown significantly over the decades, and, as a result, this "special issue has become a respectable volume in its own right, a publication which surely complements and extends the state-of-the art overviews of the field that have appeared over the last decade or so (e.g., Amerstorfer & Oxford, 2018; Cohen, 2012, 2014; Cohen & Griffiths, 2015; Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Grenfell & Harris, 2017; Griffiths, 2013, 2018; Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Oxford, 2011, 2017; Oxford & Amerstorfer, 2018; Pawlak, 2011)" (p. 526).

In contrast to this growing body of research that deals with the learning strategies from a general perspective, we would like to focus more on that part that addresses the issue of learning strategies from a specific point of view, more relevant and closer to the Albanian cultural and learning context, where students show a lack of initiative and teachers are in control of the learning process. Further, the lack of research within the Albanian context makes it even more difficult for both learners and teachers to be aware of the strategies, not to mention teaching and demonstrating them. Knowing about the learning strategies is not sufficient. Teachers and students should develop the competence of this knowledge. Language learning strategies direct and inform the methods and approaches that teachers should use in the classroom (Khansir et al., 2021).

On the other hand, learning strategies are regarded as conscious, teachable, intentional, self-chosen, self-regulated thoughts and actions for learning the target culture and language (Oxford & Gkonou, 2018). They:

a) have several interlocking purposes: improving performance on immediate tasks, developing specific skills, and improving autonomy and long-term proficiency.

b) support cognitive, emotional (affective), social, motivation and meta strategic regulation of learning.

c) are flexible and creatively combined into strategy clusters (strategies used simultaneously) and strategy chains (strategies used in sequence) to meet the learner's needs and fit the context of the task.

In addition to the specific cultural context, it would also be of interest to explore gender differences in foreign language learning, which may be related to cognitive differences between male and female students, as well as the role that culture plays on the perceived differences.

The plethora of studies to establish whether gender does influence the degree of use of learning strategies is as numerous in quantity as it is inconclusive in the results and findings. Aljuaid (2015) in the dissertation thesis provides an extensive overview of the research conclusions on the role that gender plays in the choice and frequency of the use of LLS. The research over the years has approached the issue from the biological and cognitive perspective. Earlier research, as cited by Rua (2006) and Aljuaid (2015), had mainly focused on the neurological and cognitive factors with contributions made by Gardner and Lambert (1972), Krashen (1988), Springer and Deutsch, (1989), Stern (1990), concluding that "although both males and females have the same linguistic potential as human beings (aptitude in a general sense), females' linguistic skills somehow seem more prone to be stimulated in order to reach higher levels of linguistic competence" (Rua, 2006, p. 103). Further, Rua (2006) takes into consideration the above factors as well as the social, cultural, and educational contexts. The study concludes that "girls' achievement in foreign language learning is enhanced by the interaction of neurological, cognitive, affective, social, and educational factors. Each factor is activated

in a different way for boys and for girls, with the result that girls are equipped with a combined network of variables whose mutual influence is eventually responsible for their success in foreign language learning" (p. 112).

On the other hand, Aljuaid (2015) following a thorough analysis of previous research with a focus on gender differences concludes that "such a variable as gender has to be treated with caution in regard to making conclusions about contributors to effective L2 learning. Additional socio-demographic and individual characteristics have to be taken into account in order to understand the full set of LLS use determinants" (p. 79). Similarly, Prihantoro, et. al. (2018) establish that gender does not play a role or influence learning strategies and motivation, thus, the focus should rather be on creating educational environments which stimulate motivation and learning rather than promoting prejudice or stereotypes in learning or job profiles.

C. Methodology of Research

The study sample consisted of two classes of lower secondary school students, 8th and 9th grade, in total 46 students. It is important to note that English is their second foreign language, with French being the first one. They started studying English in the 6th grade. The language level of the English books, Hotspot 2, A1-A2 level, was used by 8th graders and the book Hotspot 3, A2 level, was used by 9th graders. However, they claimed that their English language knowledge was better than that of the French language and both grades were sitting at an A2 level. The students had two concurrent classes of English once a week.

The research method used for this paper involves a mixed-method study as the dynamic nature of LLS can be best examined by using the combination between the qualitative and quantitative methods. Similarly, when arguing about mixed-method research as feasible and desirable Bryman (2018) notes, "what seems to happen is that researchers find a wider range of outcomes resulting from combining quantitative and qualitative research than they initially envisaged" (p. 94). The mixing of research methods allows us to tackle complex and challenging questions, and to expand the boundaries of foundational assumptions regarding how knowledge is constructed (Hesse-Biber, 2010). The combination of these elements, quantitative and qualitative, is made to describe the same phenomenon from different perspectives by extending the scope of the research and to provide more details and data than either of the methods does alone. The analysis that results from these two distinct data collecting tools is complimentary, where the qualitative data are often used to illustrate the quantitative results, or they help to establish more convincing quantitative data collected from the surveys or the questionnaires.

Although Oxford's *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL) was published almost 30 years ago (1990) it has achieved significant fame and it has become the most popular tool in LLS research (Amerstofer, 2018). Oxford's questionnaire Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL)[1] was also used in this study as a data collection tool, which yielded the quantitative data of the research. The SILL questionnaire is used to a considerable extent by similar research (Green & Oxford, 1995; Ruba et al., 2014; Aljuaid, 2015; Rua, 2016; Bessai, 2018; Amerstofer, 2018; Rianto, 2020) and by all the other studies researched for the purpose of this paper and cited in the references section. Therefore, it was decided that it be used even for this study in combination with the observation as part of the qualitative method to support the quantitative data. The observation for the research in question is not always a consistent method as learning strategies are mental processes and they are difficult to be observed as it has also been noted by Bessai (2018). However, for the purpose of this study the observation was conducted during a six-week period and for the same activity repeatedly, with a view of eliciting reliable data. The mixed-method research was utilized with the aim of identifying a possible pattern of language learning strategies among Albanian students, learners' awareness and whether there is a variation in terms of age, gender and learning two foreign languages simultaneously.

The SILL is organized into six strategy groups as originally identified and classified by Oxford (1990), where each group includes a list of strategy items:

Memory strategies are also known as *direct strategies* and are used to store, remember, and retrieve information from the memory. These strategies "reflect very simple principles, such as arranging things in order, making associations, and reviewing. These principles all involve meaning" (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). Within this group, there are four subsets, which include 9 memory strategy items such as relying on what they already know and making relationships with the new things, using the new language so that they can remember the words, making mental associations or reviewing.

Cognitive strategies are also direct strategies, and they are employed when learners try to understand, analyse the new language, and create, manipulate, or transform the language. There are 14 items within this group covering strategies related to practising, imitating, using the new language, initiating the production of language, analysing the structure of words, and making summaries of the information received in the new language.

Compensation strategies, another group of direct strategies, are used by learners as part of their attempts to use the new language regardless of gaps in comprehension, production or in knowledge. There are 6 strategy items within this group and in summary they include: guessing the meaning from the context either when reading or listening, making use of gestures when speaking or using synonyms when writing.

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[1] The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL) © R. Oxford. 1989 was retrieved from https://richarddpetty.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/sill-english.pdf

Direct strategies can be distinguished from indirect strategies as the latter group are not directly involved when learning the new language, instead they support and manage language learning (Oxford, 1990).

Indirect strategies include metacognitive strategies which are mainly used to organize and evaluate the learning process. Learners go beyond their cognition and start making plans for studying the new language, seek opportunities to use the new language, think about their current level of language skills, and pay attention to mistakes to improve and to progress.

Affective strategies as the word suggests help the learners control and regulate emotions, as well as address motivation and attitude. Some common strategies that learners employ include the reduction of stress and anxiety, encouraging oneself for speaking regardless of mistakes, and giving rewards or treats when one performs well in the new language.

Social strategies emphasize the fact that language is a social product and communication involves interacting and learning with other people. The promotion of social strategies is crucial for any learner where they should be encouraged to ask others to slow down or repeat what they have just said, asking for help in the new language, learning about the culture and asking for help from other people who either speak the language or are native speakers.

SILL is easy to be used for both researchers and teachers as the interpretation of data does not require a computer software and the data collected from the questionnaires were analysed by using a statistical descriptive analysis and it mainly consisted of the learning strategies that are used by the sample with the differences that able to be identified in terms of grade and gender. The other advantage of SILL is that the scoring and the feedback is immediate, and the researcher gains summative information that they may correlate with previous research. This makes drawing conclusions on the major research variables affecting the research participants possible. The time spent during the research is, therefore, minimal and this is effective in conducting worldwide research (Aljuaid, 2015).

Due to the learner's language level, SILL was adapted and translated from English into Albanian as "one form of adaptation for pragmatic advantages" (Amerstofer, 2018, p. 505) and he also claims that "it is likely that the number [of translations] has gone up in the 2000s, but no updated count is available in the literature" (p. 505). Moreover, Green & Oxford (1995) state that the reliability of various forms of the SILL for the EFL/ESL is .93-.98 depending on whether the SILL instrument is administered in the learners' own language or in L2. No other changes were made to the questionnaire regarding the statements; the only thing that was added was the gender checkbox on top of the page.

On the other hand, observation as part of the qualitative research method was used to establish whether a *fully informed or overt strategy instruction* in the learning context will make a difference. The focus was on the less used strategies, which were the compensation, affective, and the social ones, but some notes on the other strategies were also made. However, it is worth noting that the strategies were not specifically taught but rather explained to the students: what they are and how the students could use them during the activities they would carry out.

D. Limitations of the Study

This study sample was comprised of 46 student participants: 23 females and 23 males of the age 13-15 years old. 22 of the respondents were in the eighth grade and 24 were in the ninth grade. They are all Albanian nationals, but they belong to different communities because of internal migration and there were also students who belonged to the Roma community. English is their second foreign language, which was introduced to the curriculum in the 6th grade. Their first foreign language was French, which had been introduced to the curriculum since the third grade of the elementary school. The language level of the English books they were studying was A2.

Another limitation could be related to the specific learning context, which was part of the study, as a result it might produce typical or specific data that may or may not be generalized to other groups with other characteristics. Another limitation would be that during the observation period, the learning strategies were explained and used only for a repetitive activity. If the explanation and the activities were to have happened during a longer time span and across a range of activities, the results would have been more accurate.

Further, the sample of the study had almost the same level of English proficiency and the results when comparing the differences between LLS use by grade reveal almost the same data. Similarly, the gender difference would be difficult to establish in such a small sample, in addition to the insufficient information regarding the reasons for differences in the use of strategies due to gender.

Finally, studies and research in the field of language learning strategies, to the best knowledge of the researchers is missing in the Albanian context. Consequently, there was not any previous research for reference or to compare the findings.

E. Data Analysis

The results are interpreted to answer these questions:
1. Is there a general pattern of language learning strategy use among Albanian EFL learners?
2. Is there a variation in the use of the learning strategies due to grade level or gender?
3. Does a fully informed or overt strategy instruction in the learning context promote the less used strategies?

The quantitative research method, mainly the SILL questionnaire was used to answer the first and second research questions and a qualitative research method was used to answer the third question.

Figure 1 below shows the results of the SILL questionnaire, which revealed that the most used strategies by both classes were the cognitive ones, and the less used ones were the affective strategies. This could be related the higher number of items included in this category, and they all involve processes which are directly related to the production and understanding of the language, or one can also argue that it could also be related to the strategies that are encouraged more by the activities or the strategies that the teachers are using in the classroom.
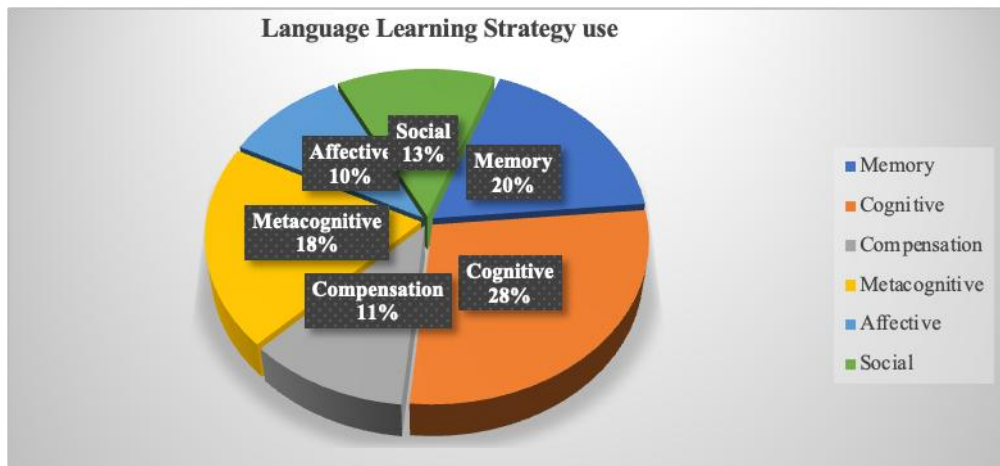

Figure 1 Language Learning Strategy Use

The other most used strategy is the memory one, which is also a direct strategy. It appears that students are relying on their own resources and efforts to coordinate their learning process.

In addition to the identification of the pattern of learning strategies among Albanian students, the other research question was to see if there was any difference in LLS due to grade level, which would coincide with their age and not their English proficiency level, as no test was conducted to determine their language proficiency level. The 8th and 9th grade students share almost the same level of English language where 8th graders use the book Hot spot 2 with an A1-A2 English level, and the 9th graders use Hot spot 3 with an A2 English level.
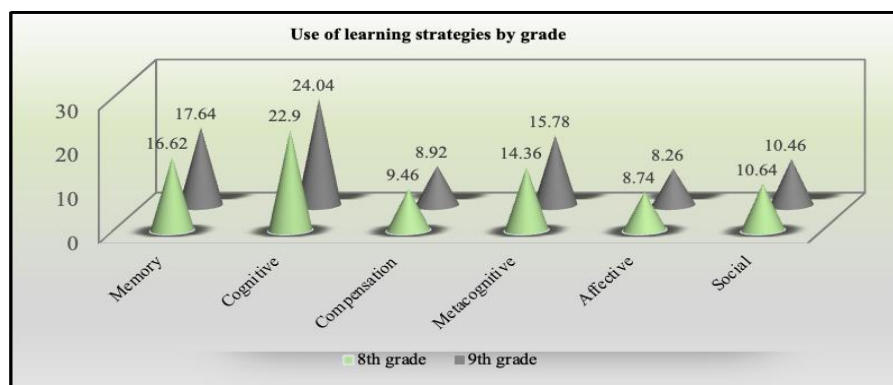

Figure 2 Language Learning Strategies Use for Each Grade

The results of the SILL scores for this category reveal no significant difference in strategy use by the students. Compared to the overall results about LLS use, 9th graders show higher use in the most used strategies mentioned above. According to the results, 9th graders use memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies more than the others. On the other hand, 8th graders as compared to the use of strategies with the 9th graders show a higher use of the strategies, respectively, social, compensation and affective strategies, which are still considered to be less used in the overall analysis. It could be stated that 8th graders are prone to use indirect strategies more than 9th graders. However, for the strategies that 8th graders use more, respectively, the compensation, affective, and social strategy, there is not any discernible difference. The strategy with the most significant difference in use is the cognitive one with a mean of 24.04 by 9th graders and a mean of 22.9 by 8th graders.
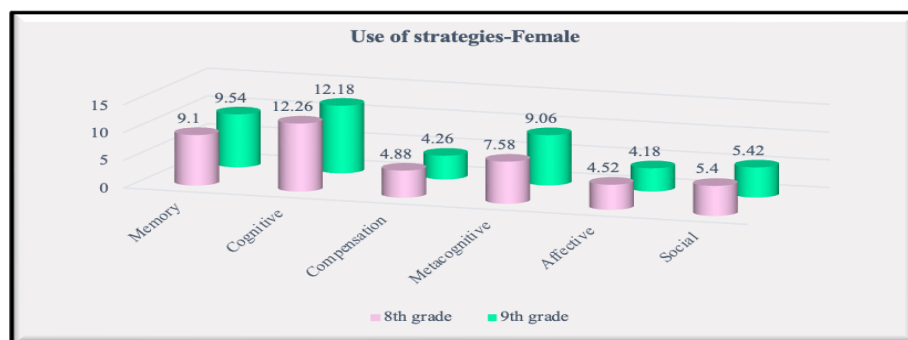
Figure 3 Language Learning Strategy Use by Females in Different Grade Levels

The analysis of SILL scores for each grade further specified for females show that 9th grade females use language learning strategies slightly more than 8th grade females. The chart above shows an irregular pattern of LLS use where there is a minor difference between the compensation, affective and social strategies and with a considerable difference in the use of metacognitive strategies with a mean of 9.06 for 9th grader and 7.58 for 8th graders. Both 8th and 9th grades females compared to the respective chart for males show a higher use of LLS in cognitive, memory and metacognitive.

Alike the results on Figures 3 and 2 above, Figure 4 below also presents an irregular pattern of LLS use among males of different grade levels. In contrast to 8th grade females having a higher use of the overall strategies, males do not share the same results. 9th grade males show higher use of LLS respectively the cognitive and memory, whereas the other strategies do not display any significant difference between the grades. The most significant difference in LLS use by males is found in the cognitive strategies, with a mean difference of 1.22.
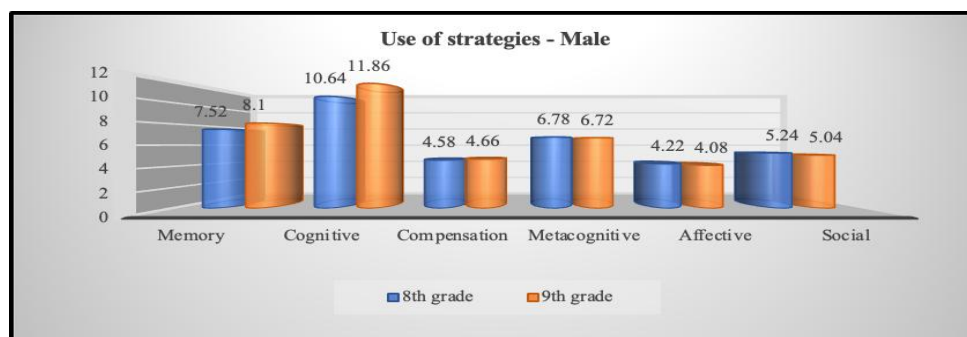

Figure 4 Language Learning Strategy Use by Males in Different Grade Level

One of the research questions of this study was if there is any difference in strategy use due to gender. The charts above made a more specific distinction to point out if there are any differences due to their grade level and then due to gender. On the other hand, the chart below (Figure 5) reveals the use of LLS with a global variation between females and males.
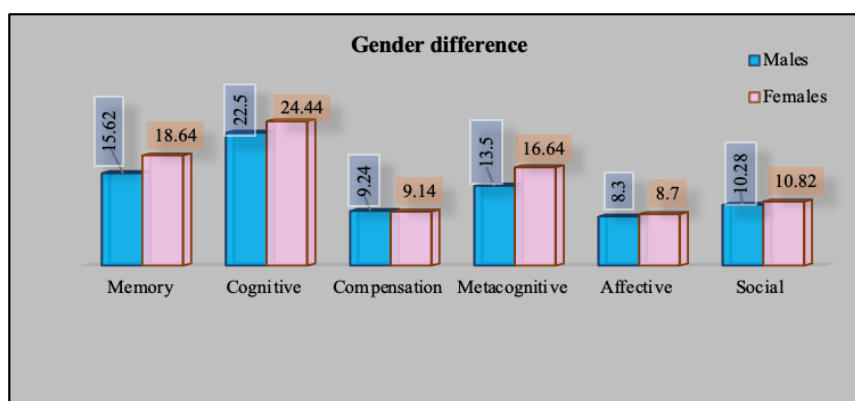

Figure 5 Language Learning Strategy According to Gender

It is important to bring attention to the fact again that there was an equal number of males and females who participated in this study, and their most significant variation was comprising in the use of cognitive and metacognitive factors with a mean difference respectively of 3.02 and 3.1.

Overall, the graph reveals that the strategy usage by females is higher except for one strategy with a minor difference. Specifically, with a mean difference of 0.10, males use compensation strategies more often than females.

The data was further organized in a table as shown below, so that more information could be extracted in relation to this variation, where the gender distinction could be analysed and interpreted whilst taking in account of the grade level.

TABLE 1
LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES GENDER VARIATION

	Female	Male	Mean difference	Female	Male	Mean difference
	8th grade	8th grade		9th grade	9th grade	
Cognitive	12.26	10.64	1.62	12.18	11.86	0.32
Memory	9.1	7.52	1.58	9.54	8.1	1.44
Metacognitive	7.58	6.78	0.8	9.06	6.72	2.34
Social	5.4	5.24	0.16	5.42	5.04	0.38
Compensation	4.88	4.58	0.3	4.26	4.66	-0.4
Affective	4.52	4.22	0.3	4.18	4.08	0.1

Table 1 provides a clear picture of the mean difference between males and females from one category to the other where it can be confirmed that females have a higher frequency of use of language learning strategy with a slight difference in the compensation category where males have a higher score of 0.4.

The results of the questionnaire consistently revealed that the social, compensation and affective strategies are used less by the Albanian students during the process of language learning. Hence, it can be concluded that students are either unaware of the use of these strategies, subsequently they were not reported, or the use of these strategies should be promoted through overt or formal instruction.

The qualitative research method of observation was used to answer the other research question:

Does a fully informed or overt strategy instruction in the learning context will promote the less used strategies?

During the observation weeks, there were carried out some activities incorporating some sub-strategies from the less used strategies, based on the SILL results. The goal was to make students aware of the strategies that they have been using unconsciously and help them make better use of the strategies discussed so far.

TABLE 2
THE SUB-STRATEGIES INCORPORATED WHILE CONDUCTING THE LESSON

Language learning strategies		Main strategies	Sub-strategies incorporated during the lesson hour
	Direct	Compensation	Guessing intelligently, overcoming limitations in writing, and speaking
	Indirect	Affective	Making positive statements, rewarding yourself, lowering anxiety
		Social	Cooperating with peers, asking questions, empathizing with others

Following the explanation of the strategies by using simple instructions and sometimes even switching to native language (Albanian), with the aim of ensuring a clear understanding of the instructions, students were then invited to use the social strategy of cooperation by being paired up, with the person right next to them and read their homework to each other. Whenever they gave the correct answer, they were appraising each other as part of the affective strategies, and when their answer was wrong, the other student would repeat it. The integration of the compensation strategies during this activity took place, particularly, when they encountered problems related to vocabulary or collocations. It was noticed that they would switch to Albanian and did not try to find the word in English. Yet, when the teacher would stand near their desk and listened to them working together for a while; they would ask for teacher's help. With the completion of this activity, the teacher would continue with the explanation of the new lesson whereas students would take down notes of the new words, switching back to the most common used strategies, mainly from the cognitive and memory categories.

Further, observation was used during this stage of the research which was deemed as necessary to elicit the data that were indispensable for answering the research question of whether informed and overt strategy instruction would promote those strategies that were used less by the learners.

During the first two weeks, there was little positive feedback. Learners were introduced to these new strategies while the researcher was incorporating them into the lesson. The use of the strategies was increasing with the passing of the weeks, until the end of week six when learners felt more comfortable using them naturally.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

A. *Discussion of the Results*

The findings of this study were elicited from the primary data which were collected statistically from the SILL questionnaire and a set of secondary data collected qualitatively during the observation weeks as complementary to the

statistical data. Firstly, the data was used for the macro level purpose of revealing the big picture about the use of strategies, whereas the observation took place to complement and personalize the data collected in the questionnaire to emphasize the answers drawn from it and to record the changes that took place in the LLS usage.

The quantitative data revealed that learners are using more the cognitive, memory and metacognitive strategies as compared to the compensation, social and affective strategies. The above categories can be seen as memory strategies for remembering and retrieving new and existing information. Cognitive strategies are used for producing and understanding the language, while compensation strategies enhance the use of the language despite the lack of knowledge. Coordinating the learning process is enhanced by metacognitive strategies while emotions are kept in check and regulated by affective strategies. Lastly, social strategies enable cooperation and promote the ability of learning with others.

It could be concluded that cognitive strategies scored the highest amongst the other categories due to Albanian learners' intrinsic motivation of learning English for international immigration either for education or employment purposes. Subsequently, they tend to sound like native speakers; they are exposed to English language on internet while using social media applications and watching movies.

Whereas the use of memory strategies could be related to rote learning and memorisation which is applied at a considerable degree by teachers in the Albanian education context. It seems that that students lack initiative and are reluctant to use the compensation strategies, another directive strategy, or they are using the language only when they feel comfortable with it. This could also be explained with their low level of English proficiency or with a general Albanian learners' profile who *are reluctant to indulge into deep, analytical, and independent learning* (Alhasani, 2015). Even though, they claimed that their English level is better than French, which could be related to a more increased motivation and more opportunities to be exposed to English rather than French.

An increased motivation and language learning experience lead to the use of strategies, which require planning and evaluation of learning (Bessai, 2018) and this can explain the fact that the metacognitive strategies are the next category scored high among Albanian learners. Metacognitive strategies are favoured by the majority of EFL students because they help them gain control over emotions and motivations related to L2 learning (Aljuaid, 2015). Moreover, it can be stated that such a result is also consistent with the study of Rianto (2020), where the findings indicated that in learning English as a foreign language, the male and female students prefer strategies that allow for centralizing learning, organizing, and planning learning and evaluating learning.

This is also in conformity with the trend widely promoted among instructors and students in non-Western countries, who are gradually moving away from rote memorization, towards deeper approaches to learning which call for higher levels of skills, including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of instructional material (Foster, 2012).

The analysis of the variation in language learning strategy use by gender was focused on the overall strategy use (Figure 5) and differences in the strategy use between males and females by their grades (Table 1). Overall, the female learners used more language learning strategies than the male learners.

Even though the study of a foreign language is traditionally seen as primarily a female subject, which may diminish the motivation and rigor of male students (Rua, 2006), in the Albanian context, the situation is slightly different with both males and females being equally encouraged to learn a foreign language. However, an explanation of this finding could be explained by taking into consideration some cultural factors where females are expected to be role models and promote positive learning environments.

With reference to the less used strategies identified by the quantitative data, respectively, the social, compensation and affective strategies, it could be stated that learners are either less reluctant to use them due to their low proficiency level or have never been encouraged to use them in the educational context. We believe that both assumptions apply in this respect as when students were instructed on and encouraged to use these strategies, the frequency of employing them increased progressively from week one to week six.

The qualitative findings reveal that the same routine with a combination of the above strategies took place for six weeks where the contexts of using any of the strategies varied from the use of compensation strategies such as "guessing intelligently" the meaning of new words prior to translation to the use of affective strategies whenever the students were giving the right answers, which was motivating even for the reluctant students. It was deduced that positive reinforcement had a positive impact on the students, particularly when it came from their peers. Students often enjoyed the use of social strategies such as asking their classmates questions about the topic or asking for the opinions of each other, which in turn promoted more class involvement.

B.. Conclusions and Recommendations

There have been many types of research concerning language learning strategies, as mentioned in the previous sections. All the results have helped in the understanding of the categories and patterns in strategy use and how they aid in acquiring different language skills. However, no research had been dedicated to the use of language learning strategies by Albanian learners to the researchers' best knowledge.

As a result, the research questions of this study were mainly focused on general issues, which have been the subject of an extensive research in other learning contexts over the years. The research questions intended to explore the pattern of use of learning strategies, variation in the use by gender and grade and whether formal instruction of the strategies would increase the degree of use.

Even though Albanian learners were able to identify some of the learning strategies that they were using while learning, it should be noted that they were mainly employing at a higher degree strategies falling under three categories, cognitive, memory and metacognitive strategies. These results are related to the prior educational experiences, where those learners who are used to studying with the help of rote memorization strategies may have developed strong memory strategies but may have weak skills for compensation and problem-solving strategies.

On the other hand, the use of metacognitive strategies should further be promoted among Albanian learners as the three elements that comprise this category, mainly, planning, monitoring, and evaluating contribute to their proficiency level and make learners more self-regulated. Learners who have high meta-cognition know better their strengths and weaknesses, the nature of the task they are performing, and the available skills or tools needed to attain their goals (Sun, 2013). In his literature review on language learning strategies, Wang (2020) mentions various studies, which have found that metacognitive strategies are highly correlated with autonomous learning and improving the level of metacognitive strategies is an effective way to improve students' autonomous learning ability (Wang, 2020).

In learning a foreign language, the role of teachers is vital as they can use learning strategies to teach their students in the classroom. There is a need to teach learning strategies systematically with the help of the course book so that learners can explore different ways in which they can improve their learning. While formally instructing the learners to incorporate the three learning strategies such as the compensation, social and affective ones, it was observed that learners felt more comfortable using them by the final stage of the study. They were aware of their use and interested in using them during the learning process. In this way, learners are taught how to proceed when studying and identify the best strategies to use when tackling the everyday demands of learning (Bessai, 2018).

Teachers should be encouraged to promote the inclusion of any of the strategies during certain tasks, for example, social and affective strategies can be safely used during class discussion and project works where students cooperate with each other, ask questions, or express their feelings. Compensation strategies should be used in other activities that promote opportunities of authentic contexts such as using the internet for online communication with native speakers or the use of online forums to promote interaction and encourage students to ask questions.

Another area, which deserves further exploration, would be the impact of the gender on LLS since this research provides only statistical data, and the factors that may affect this impact are just touched upon.

Moreover, the investigation of learning strategies among learners, who are learning two foreign languages simultaneously has drawn the attention of researchers in order to shed light on how learning different languages can in fact shape the use of language learning strategies and whether there is a variation in strategic learning between the additional languages they might be studying (e.g., L2, L3). This will inform the teaching process rather than merely conclude that the knowledge of multiple languages can give a boost to strategic learning (Pawlak & Oxford, 2018), since learners can transfer their learning strategies between L1 and L2.

In conclusion, this research provides raw materials and allows for generalizations about the language learning strategies employed by lower secondary learners with English as a second foreign language and with French being the first one. It also presents statistical information about variation in LLS use due to gender and grade.

Nevertheless, if teachers during their professional trainings are not reminded of the importance of language learning strategies and their incorporation during their teaching approaches and strategies, the results and data of similar studies will have little or no relevance at all. Only through explicit strategy instruction will the teachers be able to raise students' awareness about their learning strategies. In this way they help students develop autonomy in learning and take some responsibility for themselves, self-direct and self-regulate the whole learning process.

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