

**The effectiveness of increasing language learning strategy awareness for
students studying English as a second language**

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List of abbreviations:

AUT	Auckland University of Technology
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
FD	Field Dependent
FI	Field Independent
GLL	Good Language Learner
IGCSE	(Cambridge) International General Certificate in Secondary Education
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MLAT	Modern Language Aptitude Test
PLAB	Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery
QPT	(Oxford) Quick Placement Test
SD	Standard Deviation
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language

Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this thesis submitted for the Master's degree is the result of my own study, except for where due acknowledgement has been made. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Name: Alan Boyce

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Date: _____

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Abstract

Learning strategies, the thoughts and actions that learners use to improve their learning, and increase their ability to learn independently, have interested researchers for many years. They are one of the few factors that are known to aid language learning that might be alterable. This raises the prospect that learning strategies could be taught, or improved upon, thereby creating more successful language learners

This study assesses the current strategy practices of a group of English language learners, the intention being to increase the learners' awareness of their strategy usage and help them identify future learning opportunities. In doing so, the study is assessing the feasibility of class-based strategy introduction and instruction.

A teacher/researcher, mixed-methods approach was used for the study, employing quantitative collection methods (including Oxford's (1990) SILL – the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) to measure current strategy usage. Qualitative methods, in the form of focus groups and interviews, were used to gauge participant opinion into their current strategy usage, and to attempt to identify areas that might be regarded as useful ways by which their learning could be improved. The participant sample was a reasonably homogenous one in terms of age, learning experience and learning goals. It consisted of a class of IELTS students at a Chinese international high school, with Chinese, Thai and Korean learners taking part.

The inclusive nature of this study helped to reveal highly individual approaches to language learning, not only in terms of the strategies that were used, or thought to be useful for future learning, but in terms of the specific reasons that certain strategies and strategy types might be used. The active discussions that took place encouraged the learners to look at the way they go about their learning and, as a result, also identified specific, individual learning goals that could be included in future teaching methods. The implications here appear to support the introduction of strategy instruction in class, which if conducted in an inclusive manner, could positively affect the way learners go about acquiring their target language, while at the same time clarifying individual learning goals for the teacher, and how these might be most effectively achieved.

Chapter One - Introduction

1.1 Background

The ability to communicate through more than one language is gaining in popularity and importance in many countries and cultures. The reasons for this vary widely, from those as abstract as desires for personal growth and enrichment, to those as concrete as the provision of expanded study abroad, or employment opportunities. Being able to help people acquire and effectively use a new and foreign language is becoming increasingly acknowledged as an important task, and those who are both skilled and qualified in this field regularly sought after by language learners and learning institutions alike.

During the evolution of developing teacher expertise in this regard, recognition of the role of the learner in their own learning processes emerged as a promising area of enquiry. Some early writers took what was then seen as an extreme view of the language teacher's role in the learning process. They saw this role as minimal, believing that languages cannot be taught, and that teachers merely facilitate the process of learning. This opinion aligned, at least in part, with the notion of individualised language teaching, whereby the focus in the language classroom was placed on the individual learners – their goals and learning processes (Henry, 1975). It appeared that the role of the learner in the learning process was a complex one, determined by a number of variables, and that these individual variables might correlate with effective, successful language learning (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995).

The notion that there is such a thing as a good language learner has aroused much interest and discussion since Rubin's (1975) seminal article on the subject (for example Cook, 2001; Ellis, 1994/2002; Grenfell, 1999; Naimen, Frolich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; Nakatani, 2006; Norton & Toohey, 2001; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). What is it that some people do that assists them in acquiring a foreign language more successfully than others? Furthermore, are there activities, behaviours or traits characteristic to good language learners that could be isolated and improved upon, or taught to less successful language learners in a manner that would benefit their language acquisition, retention and use?

Research into these possibilities has provided a great deal of valuable insight into language learning processes, demonstrating the importance and effect of learner individuality. It would appear that the way people learn is dependent on a multitude of variable factors that merge

and overlap to create an individual learner. These variables include concepts such as personality, learning styles, language learning aptitude, motivation, opportunity and, the focus for this study, language learning strategies (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Rubin, 1975).

The field of language learning strategies, which might simply be described as characteristic ways in which individual learners acquire, remember and use a new language, is complex and multi-layered. Since focused research began in the 1970s (Naimen, et al., 1978; Rubin, 1975) much has been carried out with regard to identifying and classifying these strategies, and isolating their use by specific learner types and in various learning contexts. However, there still appears to be discussion, and even debate, as to what strategies are available to learners, how they should be classified, and whether certain strategies are relevant to language acquisition, or language use, or perhaps both (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002; Macaro, 2001). What does seem clear, however, is that language learning strategies can be effective methods that help to create successful learners (Lessard-Clouston, 1997; Oxford, 1990). One resulting challenge appears to be continuing to isolate language strategies and presenting them to learners in such a way as to improve their ability to acquire, retain and use their new language, and place them on the path towards self-directed, autonomous learning (Chamot, 2005).

1.2 Rationale for this study

If a goal exists to create more successful language learners, then a complementary goal of creating better teachers also exists. By being sensitive to learners' individual styles and characteristics it is possible for teachers to motivate learners to improve by providing a nurturing environment that fosters self-belief, and by providing tools that benefit the learning process (Lightbown & Spada, 2000; Oxford, 1990).

Recognising the multitude of varying factors that might interlink to create successful learners, a focus was required for this study that might yield useful results, for both learners and teachers, and possibly for other researchers, as an addition to the growing body of knowledge with regard to successful language acquisition. To this end it was decided to further investigate language learning strategies, the ways in which people go about their learning – what they do, when they do it, and why. This study attempts to explain these concepts – the physical, mental and social activities that are described as learning strategies - how and where

they fit within the overall learning process, and how by increasing both teacher and learner awareness of learning strategies, benefits can be gained for teacher and learner alike.

1.3 Aims of this study

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of assessing and improving language learning strategy awareness among a selected group of English language learners, in such a way as to improve the learners' foreign language acquisition, retention and appropriate production.

This goal was approached using three major research questions, which were to be answered using both quantitative and qualitative data acquisition and analysis:

1. What are the learners' current language learning strategy profiles?

The learner profiles were used to assess not only what current language learning strategies were being used at the time of the study, but also the relative importance and value the learners placed on a range of strategies that was presented to them. This initial stage of the research was to also have the effect of introducing the concept of language learning strategies to the learners, revealing personal insights into their individual learning processes in a manner that could then be analysed and discussed.

2. Are there any learning strategies that have been presented to the learners that they see as possibly being useful additions to their individual learning processes?

After being made aware of a range of language learning strategies and their specific uses, this question was designed to engage the learners, through open discussion, and enhance their awareness of possible learning opportunities. A successful outcome was deemed to be proportionate to the amount, variety and individuality of the responses. From these it might be concluded that the learners perceived value in the learning opportunities, which might then be tied to the effectiveness of conscious, planned, class-based language learning strategy introduction.

3. If presented with a learning context that would demand increased motivation, would the learners contemplate altering their strategy usage?

To further engage the learners, this question was designed to link to the previous question, but intensify their focus on what they currently do in terms of their learning and identify

further learning opportunities that might specifically match their individual learning styles and goals. Again, a desirable outcome was to be determined by the variety and individuality of the responses which might point towards the usefulness and viability of increasing strategy awareness within a specific learning context.

1.4 Context of the study

The study was to be carried out with a class of my own learners. The execution of the research was designed to be as noninterventionist as possible, carried out instead as a viable component of usual teaching methodology, in doing so hopefully adding to the body of knowledge regarding the feasibility of language learning strategy instruction to foreign language learners.

1.5 Chapter overview

Chapter 2 aims to review the concept and purpose of language, the variable factors that are considered to both comprise and affect the processes of successful language learning, and to contextualise the place of language learning strategies within those processes. Further investigation into language learning strategies is made with regard to definition and classification with a view towards identifying strategy types and usage contexts. With communication having been surmised as a specific goal of language, communication strategies are looked at in further detail, as is the debate as to whether these strategies are related to language acquisition, or language use, or both. Historical strategy research is examined, especially with regard to the possibility of creating better learners, and a case for continued research into this field, and the likely contexts in which it might best be conducted, is considered.

Chapter 3 presents an overview of the research methodology and of the participants who graciously agreed to take part in the research process. A discussion is given with regard to the selection of the eventual mixed-methods research approach, a description given regarding the research instruments that were chosen or designed for the study, and an explanation given as to how both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research were conducted. Ethical considerations are discussed in terms of the participants, the conduct of the research, and its future possible applications and use.

Chapter 4 gives an explanation as to how the various data types were to be analysed and the results presented.

Chapter 5 presents full data analysis and presentation of the findings. Due to the complex nature of the mixed-methods approach chosen for this study, the findings are discussed progressively as they are presented. Both quantitative and qualitative instruments produced certain secondary data that appeared significant enough to be included in these findings and these are also discussed. These pertain to strategy usage according to learning purpose, by gender, and by ethnicity.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusions that appear feasibly able to be drawn from the findings. The conclusions are presented in terms of the participants' current strategy usage, their opinions regarding future useful learning opportunities that increased strategy awareness might present, and how these might positively affect my own teaching methodology. Possible limitations of the study are itemised. Implications of the research are presented, as are recommendations for future research, including those relating to the inconclusive secondary findings presented in the previous chapter. Finally, a conclusion is presented relating to the mixed-methods approach chosen for this study, and to the nature of the teacher/researcher model.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

2.1 The meaning of language

Scollon (2004) describes language as “a multiple, complex, and kaleidoscopic phenomenon” (p. 272). Highlighting the intricacies of language, in terms of design, context and purpose, this observation served as a reminder of the challenges faced by language learners, and their teachers. Further clarification into the definition of second language acquisition (SLA) was warranted, therefore, to assist with the understanding of the processes involved with language learning, identify possible pathways or obstacles within these processes and, thereby, help to add meaning to the research findings of this study.

2.1.1 English as a Second Language vs. English as a Foreign Language

Terminologies, among many others frequently associated with SLA, *English as a Second Language* (ESL) and *English as a Foreign Language* (EFL), are commonly misused, misunderstood, or used interchangeably. For this study it is useful that a definitive difference be made, and one chosen, as there are significant ramifications in terms of learning, teaching and researching in the two contexts. ESL, for example, is taught and acquired in an environment where English is the main language of communication and the learners are immersed in not only the language, but also the culture (Ellis, 1994/2002; Nayar, 1997). EFL, on the other hand, the term relevant for this study, is a situation where English is taught in a country where it is not the main language of communication, and can be taught by both non-native speakers and native speakers alike. EFL situations place severe limitations on the learners’ abilities to practise their new language outside of the classroom, and this context presents far-reaching implications for teaching and learning methods and strategies – what is learned and how it is learned.

2.1.2 Second language acquisition – questions of interpretation

The interpretation in the literature of SLA is also far from clear. Firstly, a clarification is required pertaining to a definition of a *second language*, or L2. Ellis (1994/2002) refers to multilingual learners who have become competent in more than one language apart from their

first, or native, language. In these cases, English might be being learned as a third, or even fourth language. Even so, as Ellis (1994/2002) states, “the term ‘second’ is generally used to refer to any language other than the first language” (p. 11).

The term *acquisition* itself has also come under scrutiny. Krashen (1981) distinguished between acquisition and *learning* whereby the former can be seen as a process of picking up a language subconsciously, and the latter as a conscious process of actual study. Ellis (1994/2002), however, states that: “According to this view, it is possible for learners to ‘acquire’ or to ‘learn’ rules independently and at separate times” (p. 14), although differentiating what language has been acquired or learned is problematical for teachers and researchers. McLaughlin (1987) also took issue with Krashen’s (1981) view, proposing that the distinction between ‘conscious’ and ‘subconscious’ was lacking clarity, and that it was difficult to determine which of the two mental processes was being used at a given time. For these reasons, the two terms will be viewed as interchangeable in this study, which is in line with common usage (Ellis, 1994/2002), and SLA will be viewed as the process of learning a language other than the learner’s first language (L1).

2.2 L2 learners and users

Bearing in mind the different situational contexts of ESL and EFL learning and acquisition, some researchers also make a distinction between L2 *users* and L2 *learners*, the implications of which have some bearing on the participants of the research participants for this study. Cook (2002) proposes that there are pronounced differences between the two, whereby users “are exploiting whatever linguistic resources they have for real-life purposes...[and] Language *learners* are acquiring a system for later use” (p. 2). This view has a bearing on the research for this paper whereby a stark reality is faced by many L2 teachers in that many L2 learners are studying the language alongside other subjects and their L2 “has no current purpose in their lives as a language for immediate use, and marginal relevance for their futures” (Cook, 2002, p. 3). This might have a direct relationship with motivational issues for the learners and, therefore, their individual approaches to their learning processes.

2.3 Learning strategies – their place in the process of successful language learning

The existence and use of language learning strategies, which concern the processing, storage and retrieval of information (Brown, 2007) has been studied and discussed by researchers for the past thirty-five years (Brown, 2007; Chamot, 2005; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975). There appears no doubt of the importance that is placed on them in the literature as factors in the successful acquisition of second languages and, indeed, form the basis for this study.

Before learning strategies, their definition and their coverage in the literature to date, are looked at in detail however, other factors that are deemed to affect learning and assist successful language acquisition will be reviewed. By doing so, the place of learning strategies within the learning process can be more accurately judged, how these other factors might affect the strategy choices made by L2 learners, and eventually how the combination of these factors alongside strategy use can assist in the creation of successful L2 learners.

2.4 The existence of successful language learners

Successful language learners, often referred to as *good* language learners, have been frequently identified in the literature (Cook, 2001; Ellis, 1994/2002; Griffiths, 2008; Naimen, et al., 1978; Norton & Toohey, 2001; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Rubin, 1975; Wenden & Rubin, 1987) and some of these opinions and theories related to successful language learning are discussed below.

Cook (2001) acknowledged the existence of successful language learners to whom she referred as “people who are good at languages” as set apart from “those who are less good” (p. 127). Ellis (1994/2002) equated some studies regarding successful language acquisition as identifying the strategies that successful learners use, although showing concern with regard to “how to identify, describe, and classify the ‘behaviors and actions’ that constitute learners’ attempts to learn” (p. 37). Notwithstanding this concern, Ellis (1994/2002) still recognised that learner strategy studies have been an area of significant growth in SLA research.

Naimen, et al. (1978) attempted to identify learning differences “among good and poor learners” (p. 8) with a view towards isolating and identifying strategies that might be introduced or taught to those less successful learners. To this end they produced an influential study based on the characteristics and learning strategies of good language learners, *The*

Good Language Learner, referred to as *The GLL*, (Naimen et al., 1978). Norton and Toohey (2001) state that *The GLL* was published at a time when there was a great deal of interest in the field of successful language acquisition and when research was being proposed (Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975) that might isolate activities undertaken by successful language learners that somehow set them apart from less successful learners. Norton and Toohey (2001) stated:

Examining the experiences of adults and children defined as good language learners by themselves, by their teachers, or by performance on language proficiency measures, the intent of *The GLL* was to discover if successful learners had particular constellations of personality characteristics, cognitive styles, attitudes, motivations, or past learning experiences that were different from those of less successful learners. (p. 309)

Rubin (1975), another pioneer in research into successful language acquisition, also identified ‘good language learners’ and while her article focused mainly on learning strategies, she also proposed that there were many other variables in terms of individual characteristics and traits that could assist a language learner to be successful, for example “aptitude, motivation and opportunity” (p. 42). Griffiths (2008) is in no doubt that the successful language learner exists, but sees the basis of Rubin’s article as still controversial, in that while consensus has been found in some areas, other issues are yet to be resolved even today, and points towards questions that are still to be satisfactorily researched and answered. For example (Griffiths, 2008, p. 1-2):

- What is it that makes for a good language learner?
- Why are some learners more successful than others?
- How do learner characteristics such as motivation, beliefs, aptitude, age, gender, style, personality and culture, and learner behaviour such as strategy use, metacognition, or autonomy relate to effective language learning?
- What have we already found out and what do we still need to know?

It does, therefore, seem reasonable to assume that the successful, or good, language learner does exist and that their acquisition of L2s is superior to that of other, less successful learners. However, it also appears that a prescriptive definition of a good language learner is more elusive, and that any definition that ignores individual learner characteristics and learning

differences will not apply. In fact, it has been proposed that: "...*the* successful or good language learner, with predetermined overall characteristics, does not exist. There are many individual ways of learning successfully" (Naimen, et al., 1978, p. ix).

Measuring that success also presents its own set of problems in that it is not at all clear the extent to which an individual might be considered a good language learner, or indeed where on a continuum a learner might pass from being an unsuccessful language learner, to being successful. There is even a debate as to what might constitute success in terms of language acquisition – the answer being embedded in various definitions of capability, performance, proficiency and competence. Brown (2007) proposes an attractively simple distinction whereby *competence* can be viewed as a learner's "underlying knowledge of the system of a language – its rules of grammar, its vocabulary...and how those pieces fit together", and where *performance* includes "actual production (speaking, writing) or the comprehension (listening, reading) of linguistic events" (p. 36). Confusing the debate further, however, is the additional theory of *communicative competence*, as opposed to L2 performance as described above. Ellis (1994/2002) states that communicative competence involves not only the accurate use of language, but also its appropriate and effective use as pertaining to specific communicative goals.

As these goals could vary hugely from learner to learner, and from context to context, it seems reasonable to assume that what could be considered success for one learner might be completely different for another. For example, learners might determine their success, or whether they are a good learner, merely on comparative grades with their fellow pupils along with feedback from their teachers (Bullock, 2004) disregarding the influence of external measurement in the form of examination. Other learners, however, might have quite different, and quite specific goals. For example an L2 learner of English might wish for a certain result from a standardised English measuring system such as IELTS (International English Language Testing System) in order to emigrate or study abroad, while another learner might merely wish to communicate and understand basic queries and replies, such as a traveller in a foreign language-speaking country.

Both of these types of learners might have their own standards of successful acquisition and production and, importantly with regard to the purpose of this study, use specific, and varying, language learning strategies with which to attain that success. In other words, how

and when individuals use specific learning strategies will vary widely, determined by any number of factors and, as a result, there will exist many different types of successful language learners (Rubin, 1975). Therefore, while the successful language learner exists, there is no stereotypical good language learner – a learner with a specific set of personal and psychological characteristics, with a specific learning style, who uses a specific set of learning strategies.

2.5 What makes a successful language learner?

Having identified through the literature the existence of successful language learners, and establishing that the concept of learning strategies appear to be connected with their success, attention can be turned to the other variables that are seen to be associated with successful language acquisition. By doing so, an interconnectivity between learning strategies and these other factors in the learning process can be further established. Rubin (1975, p. 42) considered successful learning to be dependent on three variables – “aptitude, motivation and opportunity”, and how these factors are linked to the learning process is discussed below.

2.5.1 Aptitude

Dornyei (2005) proposes that mental abilities, which include traits such as thinking, reasoning and processing information, are all cognitive skills, and although some scholars see these as separate from aptitude, in reality and in common practice the terms ability and aptitude are used interchangeably. Dornyei states that the special ability to successfully learn a foreign language has been referred to variously as an aptitude for languages, or a propensity or, more colloquially, as a flair, or a knack for languages. Commonly these abilities are viewed as innate, rather than learned behaviours, and this could be considered to have an important effect on learning strategy choices among learners of varying ability.

However, Dornyei (2005) concludes that language aptitude, as a definitive concept, is an ambiguous one that might not strictly exist, and states: “we have a number of cognitive factors making up a composite measure that can be referred to as the learner’s overall capacity to master a foreign language” (p.34). In other words, those who show a special propensity or talent for language learning may vary in the abilities, and learning strategies, that they possess and use.

Although a distinguishing feature of aptitude is the ability to learn quickly, the two most popularly used aptitude tests, albeit used less frequently nowadays (Coombe, Folse, & Hubley, 2007), the MLAT (Modern Language Aptitude Test) and the PLAB (Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery), both recognise that language aptitude is made up of a variety of abilities and, importantly, that learners do not have to be strong in all of these components to be successful (Lightbown & Spada, 2000, pp. 32-33). In fact, while aptitude may enhance the speed and ease of acquisition, it should not be seen as a prerequisite for L2 acquisition (Carroll cited in Ellis, 1994/2002). Ellis also identifies another factor that he regards the research to assume, and that is: “that aptitude will only have an effect on learning outcomes if the learners are sufficiently motivated to learn (i.e. make the effort to use their intrinsic abilities)” (p. 496). According to Gordon (2008), there are others who also see a link between aptitude and the desire to learn, and this view has to do with the debate on the extent to which it is believed aptitude can be modified. Some view aptitude “as an unvarying characteristic, others assert that it can be enhanced through training, while still others allude to the intricate relationship between aptitude and motivation” (p. 251). For the language teacher, the reality is that both theories might be true. A main objective of strategy research, therefore, might be to further establish the links between strategy training, motivation and aptitude, as the three factors might be continuously and positively interconnected.

2.5.2 Motivation

Sufficient levels of motivation seem to logically point towards aiding success in language acquisition. Gardner (cited by Lightbown & Spada, 2000) states that: “... the overall findings show that positive attitudes and motivation are related to success in second language learning” (p. 33).

Two kinds of motivation, both eventually related to successful language acquisition, were described by Gardner and Lambert (1972): *instrumental* – whereby practical goals exist for the learner such as, for example, learning an L2 to increase job opportunities or to pass an examination, and *integrative* – whereby the language is being used for personal reasons such as enhancing cultural immersion and social intercourse (cited in Brown, H. D., 2007, p. 170). Leaver, Ehrman and Shekhtman (2005) identify two other types of motivation: *extrinsic*, “which focuses on the fact that the reason [for learning] is outside of you” and *intrinsic*

motivation which “has to do with what makes you feel good or whole” (p. 104). Ushioda (2008) describes extrinsic motivation as pertaining to a means to a specific goal, such as obtaining employment, and intrinsic motivation as pertaining to the goal itself - self-fulfilment in terms of satisfaction acquired through personal concepts of reward, which might include the attainment of knowledge. Others view motivation as internal – “motivation that comes from the individual and the learning situation...[and] external motivation [which] is generated by factors such as culture, parents and financial reward” (Brown, A., 2008, p. 200).

It follows that motivation levels, and motivation types, can be affected by differing communicative requirements or goals, and that individual attitudinal responses to these might vary. For example, if the learner sees the sole reason for learning as external pressure, for example an unwanted subject in a school syllabus, then negative attitudes might be created (Lightbown & Spada, 2000). Basically, the learner is unwilling and it is unlikely that successful learning will occur. At the other end of the spectrum, it would appear that the successful language learner is motivated by a desire to communicate, regardless of the location or reason (Rubin, 1975). It might then follow that the reasons for a learner’s motivation, or lack thereof, can affect the learning strategies that are chosen, and the extent to which they are used – the learner’s motivation can affect not only what is studied, but how it is studied (Leaver, et al., 2005).

2.5.3 Opportunity

Rubin’s (1975) third variable, opportunity, involves the amount of exposure a learner has to their L2, along with chances to practise it both in and out of the classroom. Rubin proposed that it is up to the learner what advantage is taken of these opportunities and that it is the good language learner who actively seeks out and makes the most of those opportunities – activities, for example, such as reading foreign books and papers, watching L2 movies and TV programmes, or joining L2 conversation groups.

Activities such as these are, in fact, language learning strategies, and Gordon (2008) further explains use of opportunity as a possible relationship between motivation and aptitude. Where a learner with a perceived aptitude for L2 acquisition might squander opportunities to learn through a lack of desire to do so, it is also possible that a less successful learner might view opportunities to learn “as more valuable and therefore apply themselves to the task of

learning with greater urgency” (p. 251). Rubin (1975) described this urgency as a factor that will assist a learner to become competent, and it has also been suggested that opportunity will only be beneficial to a learner if full advantage is taken of that opportunity by the learner (Brown, 2008).

2.6 Other variables that might affect successful language acquisition

At this point it has been broadly determined that a successful language learner may have a natural ability for learning languages, have a strong desire to learn and communicate, and take advantage of opportunities to do so. What might also be useful to consider at this stage, and that has also been touched upon, is the multitude of reasons that learners make the effort to acquire a second language. Leaver, et al. (2005, p. 4) and Lewis (1999, p. 3) suggest the following as some popular reasons:

- Gaining skills for a job
- Gaining access to foreign bodies of knowledge
- Travelling abroad
- Studying abroad
- Working abroad
- School course requirement
- Personal edification
- Interest in linguistics
- Parental influence
- Interest in another culture

Clearly, these suggested reasons are extremely diverse and it is reasonable to assume that each might, to varying degrees, differently affect, or be affected by, aptitude, motivation and opportunity. However, the literature shows that there is more to the successful language learner – individual variables that are crucial to the study of successful acquisition and which are also affected to varying degrees by the goals and challenges presented by learners’ individual reasons for learning. These variable factors are introduced below as personality, learning styles and, the focus of this study, learning strategies.

2.6.1 Personality

Personality has been defined as “those aspects of an individual’s behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, thought, actions and feelings which are seen as typical and distinctive of that person and recognized as such by that person and others” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, pp. 394-5). Understanding what has been described as the affective domain of individuals – how learners feel and respond, and what they value and believe, is very important with regard to our understanding of second language acquisition (Brown, 2007). However, proving these factors as certain indicators of successful language learning is a difficult and complex task, although there are frequent references in the literature pertaining to the relationship between personality and the other factors commonly discussed as assisting, or affecting, successful language acquisition.

Regarding an individual’s feeling of self-worth, Brown (2007) states:

Self-esteem is probably the most pervasive aspect of any human behaviour. It could easily be claimed that no successful cognitive or affective activity can be carried out without some degree of self-esteem, self-confidence, knowledge of yourself and self-efficacy – belief in your own capabilities to successfully perform that activity... Personality development universally involves the growth of a person’s concept of self, and reflection of self as seen in the interaction between self and others. (p. 154)

As the notion of self-esteem appears related to that of self-confidence it follows that this, in turn, might affect motivation. For example, when there is a desire to maintain levels of self-worth, especially when faced with possible failure, inhibitions that could stifle successful language acquisition might be lowered (Dornyei, 2005).

Four other personality traits considered to correlate with successful language acquisition are assertiveness, self-control, adventuresomeness, and conscientiousness, with all but the latter being associated with extroversion (Reiss, 1981) and, by association, its counterpart introversion. While it is understandable to correlate the seemingly extroverted, vocal and participative student with being a good learner, in reality these two factors are commonly misunderstood as Leaver, et al. (2005) maintain: “Introverts can be very outgoing and assertive [and] extraverts also need ‘downtime’ and quiet to restore their balance” (p. 114). Passivity in the classroom, therefore, is not always a sign of an ineffective learner. In fact, the research has failed to show a clear case for either extroversion or introversion to be either

helpful or detrimental to the process of successful language acquisition (Brown, 2007). Ehrman (2008), in her study into the relationships between personality and successful language acquisition, found links between introversion and good language learning which, she stated, ran “contrary to much of the literature, and, even, to pedagogical intuition”. Eventually, Ehrman (2008) concluded: “there are high-level language learners in a wide variety of personality categories [and] that motivated individuals can become good language learners whatever their personalities” (p. 70).

Indeed, while some believe that “certain personality traits have been studied and found to have significant correlation with successful language learning” (Reiss, 1981, p. 121), others feel the research is inconclusive and that there is little that shows a definitive relationship between successful learning and personality. The importance of personality appears to be in how it combines with other factors that forms a contribution to successful language learning (Lightbown and Spada, 2000).

2.6.2 Learning styles

Learning styles have to do with cognition: how learners perceive and increase knowledge, with conceptualisation; how they form ideas and think, with affect; and how, according to their emotions and personal values, they act (Guild, 1998). Or, as Akiba and Alkins (2010, p. 64) describe, learning styles are: “tendencies for approaching learning tasks and processing information in particular ways”. Varying widely from individual to individual, learners exhibit clear preferences in their methods of learning. “The term ‘learning style’ has been used to describe a learner’s natural, habitual and preferred way of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills” (Reid, 1995, cited in Lightbown and Spada, 2000, p.35). Ellis (1994/2002, p. 499) notes that the idea “learner training” is based on the concept of learning styles, in that it might be possible to assist learners to explore their individual styles and learning preferences with a view to shaping their approaches to suit the requirements of specific learning tasks. He adds a caveat, however, in that while there are certainly enormous differences in the ways individuals go about their learning approaches to L2s, current research is inconclusive and it is not possible to say which learning styles work best.

This is not to say that research into learning styles has not been forthcoming, as it is widely referred to in the literature, and the number and variety of styles that have been isolated and considered is broad. Possibly the most commonly stated learning styles are summarised by Reid (1987, p. 89) as:

1. visual learning (e.g. reading and studying charts)
2. auditory learning (e.g. listening to lectures or to audio tapes)
3. kinaesthetic learning (involving physical responses)
4. tactile learning (hands-on learning, as in building models)

Rubin and Thompson (1994) also refer to learners with different learning preferences. Some, for example, might prefer a highly structured approach to their L2 learning, with constant correction, graded exercises, thorough explanations and set rules. These learners are described as analytical and reflective, possibly reluctant to produce language in class for fear of error. Such learners, it might be assumed, could appear in a class situation to be introverted. Other types of learners are seen as more intuitive, gathering information and imitating the production of native speakers. These types of learners might also be more willing to take risks with their L2, preferring to communicate over fear of error, and might appear in class to be extroverted. Rubin and Thompson (1994) state, however, that factors such as this, while they should certainly be taken into account by the teacher when planning lesson content and tasks, are not necessarily seen, one over the other, as evidence of more successful learning.

Active/impulsive and reflective learning styles, for example, have numerous implications for language acquisition, but again, neither are certain predictors of a good language learner. Research has shown that reflective learners, who have a tendency to think things through – referred to as reflective observation (Felder & Henriques, 1995) – were slower but more accurate than more impulsive learners in reading. However, some suggest that good guessers (fast-accurate learners) are better acquirers of their L2, as measured by the standard TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) test, but then warn that impulsiveness, and the attendant fast acquisition, does not always result in accuracy (Jamieson, cited in Brown, 2007).

Others though, view certain learning factors, or styles, as important predictors of successful, or unsuccessful, language learning. A tolerance for ambiguity is seen as one such factor – the

ability to tolerate L2 language properties that appear unnatural or confusing (Brown, 2007: Reiss, 1981). Omaggio and Birckbichler (cited in Reiss, 1981) found learners with a low tolerance for ambiguity as predisposed to “give up quickly when the task presents difficulty, doubt or ambiguity...[and that they] do not like to take risks” (p. 122). Similarly, Naimen et al. (1978) found a tolerance for ambiguity to be a strong predictor for success, especially in the early stages of language learning.

The cognitive factors of field dependence and field independence have also been considered in depth by researchers. A field dependent (FD) learner has a tendency to see things as a unified whole, while a field independent (FI) learner is more apt to isolate detail without distraction from other items also involved (Brown, 2007). A tendency towards FI has generally been found helpful with traditional classroom learning (Cook, 2001) and predictive of successful language acquisition in later stages of formal learning (Naimen, et al., 1978), while it is suggested that the empathetic FD learner might be a natural communicator, creating the assumption that good language learners might possess both styles, and use them for different types of learning (Brown, 2007).

Notwithstanding the inconclusive nature with regard to learning styles and preferences as being pointers to successful acquisition – itself a product of ill-defined definition and overlap (e.g. learning styles vs. learning strategies) (Ellis, 1994/2002) – an awareness of individual style, by both teacher and learner, might highlight strengths and weaknesses and encourage learners to take action on their own behalf which is a major step towards learner autonomy – the ability of a learner to make their own decisions regarding their learning processes (Grenfell, 1999) – with assistance from the teacher who can focus on content and tasks which suit their learners (Brown, 2007).

2.6.3 Learning strategies

After reviewing what is said in the literature regarding the factors that are believed to affect second language acquisition, and suggesting some tentative relationships between these factors and learning strategies, it is pertinent now to take a detailed look at learning strategies in an effort to clarify and define exactly what they are, gauge their relative importance with regard to second language acquisition, and discuss how the choices learners make with regard

to strategy choices might be affected by factors such as motivation and opportunity, aptitude and personality, and the context and purpose of learning.

2.7 Defining learning strategies

The concept and definition of language learning strategies has not always been universally agreed upon. Cohen (1998, p. 3) states that there are “conflicting views” and Ellis (1994/2002, p. 529) mentions that the concept of strategy is “a somewhat fuzzy one, and...not easy to tie down”. Furthermore, there has not always been agreement as to the role learning strategies play in the acquisition of second languages. O’Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, and Kupper (1985, p. 558) state: “Theories of second language learning and proficiency often include a cognitive component, but the role of learning strategies has remained vague”.

As learning strategies have been discussed and researched in detail since Rubin’s (1975) seminal article on the good language learner, one has to question why the controversy and debate still continues. The problem at first appears to be a matter of semantics with terms and words that are used synonymously and interchangeably (Macaro, 2001), but further investigation reveals the true complexity of the issue.

Macaro (2001, p. 19) looks first at the term itself and proposes a distinction between *learner* strategies and *learning* strategies whereby a learner strategy is an action used by a learner “to help with the accomplishment of all language-related tasks”, such as using textual context to infer the meaning of unknown vocabulary. However, should the learner then decide to commit the new vocabulary to memory, this would be considered a learning strategy which is unrelated to the original language task. While using both terms, Macaro also argues that the term *learner strategies* places more of an emphasis on the learner “as the *active participant* in the process of learning” (p. 20). However, Macaro’s distinction appears somewhat vague, as the example he gives - using context to determine meaning - could be perceived as a learning strategy. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the more commonly used term *learning strategies* will be used and can be deemed to include learner strategies while recognising a suggested distinction between the two.

The difficulty in defining exactly what these learning strategies are might be at least partially explained by McDonough (1995) who notices a number of terms which might overlap with

the concept of strategies such as linguistic skills (about which a separate debate continues with regard to which skills actually exist), cognitive processes (mental processes which are deemed to transform information, such as ideas into speech), compensation (actions which help to overcome communication breakdown), and plans of action (specific paths created and used by successful language learners). Macaro (2001, p. 19) recognises the separateness of these terms which have “all been used at separate times to discuss learner strategies” and goes on to explain that a reason for the varieties of definition with regard to strategies is because “these definitions are linked to the researcher’s or author’s main sphere of interest”.

This lack of consensus might be highlighted, for example, by a disagreement over whether or not *communication strategies* ought to be included in a list of learning strategies. It appears that some researchers believe that learning strategies are all receptive or process-related skills such as memorising, practising and organising, whereas others believe that there is definitely a process of learning going on with the process of communicating itself (Macaro, 2001). Ellis (1994/2002) identifies other distinctions between strategy types: *production strategies* by which learners attempt to clearly and efficiently use their linguistic systems; *communication strategies* by which learners attempt to deal with communication problems during actual interaction; and *learning strategies*, which Tarone (1980, p. 419) describes as being “an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language”. This definition could be regarded as problematical in itself as it appears to subsume the two former definitions. Ellis (1994/2002) also views the distinctions, although important, as problematical as they are reliant on the learners’ intentions “which are often not clear or easy to establish. There is, for example, no easy way of telling whether a strategy is motivated by a desire to learn or a desire to communicate” (p. 530).

By analysing a number of definitions for learning strategies that have been made over the years it might be possible to highlight some of the obvious problem areas and, thereby, arrive at a working definition that satisfies most of the issues, and is relevant with regard to the purpose of this study:

The behaviours and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning that are intended to influence the learner’s encoding practice. (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986, cited in Ellis, 2002, p. 531)

Learning strategies are techniques, approaches, or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information. (Chamot, 1987, p. 71)

Language learning strategies are behaviours or actions which learners use to make learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable. (Oxford, 1990, p. 8)

The mental and communicative processes that learners deploy to learn a second language. (Nunan, 1999, p.55)

Learning strategies are the specific actions one takes and/or techniques one uses in order to learn. (Leaver, et al., 2005, p. 65)

...the moment-by-moment techniques that we employ to solve “problems” posed by second language input and output. (Brown, 2007, p. 132)

A number of issues are apparent, and these have to do with author interpretations as much as they do with the learners and their actions. Firstly, is the discrepancy between proposed conscious strategies and subconscious strategies – the former being “deliberate actions” as proposed by Chamot (1987, p. 71) which makes them intentional. Secondly, as Ellis (1994/2002) points out, there are discrepancies between the types of actions of which strategies consist. For example, Oxford (1990, p. 8) regards strategies as “behaviours or actions”, which would be observable, whereas Weinstein and Meyer (1983) see strategies as including both behaviours and thoughts. To further muddy the waters there are discrepancies with regard to the language used to describe what the learners are doing. Not only are there semantic issues between terms such as *behaviours* and *actions*, but also, notably, with Chamot’s (1987) addition of the term *approaches* which could reasonably include a range of learner traits not covered in the other definitions, such as, for example, motivation and attitude, the addition of which would appear to add a whole new dimension to the debate.

However, it has already been discussed how learner characteristics such as motivation, attitude and even learning styles, while certainly having an effect on the strategies that a learner might use, or even how they are used, are generally viewed as separate entities rather than strategies in themselves. Considering this, and accepting that there is not likely to be complete consensus in the near future, it will still be useful to locate definitions that capture the intent of the concept of learning strategies, definitions that are personally meaningful and

relevant to this study and the research undertaken. The two definitions below are both useful in this regard, with the first including the term *comprehension*, which implies understanding. The second includes the term *use of*, which is personally viewed as an essential element which accepts that learning takes place during communication, and the term *often intentionally*, which considers the distinction between conscious and subconscious action.

[Learning strategies are] the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information. (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 1)

[Learning strategies are] specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language. (Oxford, 2002, p. 124)

What does seem important to bear in mind, as researchers, and perhaps especially as teachers, is that no matter what material is presented to learners, and in what fashion, ultimately it must be remembered that learners have minds of their own, and it is they who will decide how they will approach their learning tasks and challenges. Sometimes their choices are observable, but at other times the choices are made in the privacy of their own minds. This independence, and individuality, creates immediate methodological problems for teachers and researchers into strategy use – for how does one measure, or even understand, the “invisible contents of the mind” (Cook, 2008, p. 105)?

2.7.1 The effectiveness of learning strategies

The lack of consensus with regard to a concrete definition of learning strategies aside, there does not appear to be the same dissent with regard to their effectiveness in the learning process. Oxford and Crookall (1989), for example, stated that:

Strategies are referred to as learning techniques, behaviours, or actions; or learning-to-learn, problem-solving, or study skills. No matter what they are called, strategies can make learning more efficient and effective. (p. 404)

Research by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) also showed that the effective use of particular learning strategies can positively affect language acquisition and is an indicator of successful

learners. Furthermore, they recognised that these activities might be learned from, and that the concept of successful learners undertaking strategies that assisted with their success was in contrast with the earlier notion that good language learners possessed an inherent ability for language learning.

2.7.2 The classification of learning strategies

Regardless of the past research into the existence and application of learning strategies, “exactly how many strategies are available to learners to assist them in L2 learning and how these strategies should be classified is open to debate” (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002, p. 368). Various suggestions on how strategies can be enumerated and classified have been made (O’Malley, et al., 1985; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990), each of which is based on an individual theory about learning strategies and their effect on L2 acquisition. Some, for example, place importance on socio/affective strategies which suggests that the researchers believe that the learners themselves, and their interactions with others, are of great importance (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002).

The early work of researchers (Rubin, 1975; Naiman, et al., 1978) with regard to learning strategies, and their application by learners, demonstrated two important facts: firstly, that second language learners applied language learning strategies and, secondly, that these strategies could be described and classified (O’Malley et al., 1985). However, much of this early work was more involved with compiling inventories of observed strategy use rather than focusing on classifying the strategies into exclusive categories (Ellis, 1994/2002).

Eventually though, Rubin (1981) saw strategies as falling under two broad categories:

- Strategies that *directly* affect learning, such as clarification/verification, monitoring, memorisation, guessing/inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning and practice.
- Strategies that *indirectly* affect learning, such as creating opportunities to use and practice the language, and using production tricks such as communication strategies.

Oxford (1990) used this classification as a basis for her own direct/indirect strategy classification, albeit with some important differences. An initial concern was that Rubin’s (1981) classification system was not detailed enough, and that overlaps appeared within

classification areas, creating categories of strategies that were not mutually exclusive (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002).

Oxford's (1990) direct/indirect dichotomy differed from Rubin's (1981) in that it introduced categorical groups under which separate strategies could be listed. Learning strategies were still divided into *direct* and *indirect*, where direct strategies "require mental processing of the language" and, thereby, "directly involve the target language" (Oxford, 1990, p. 37). Indirect strategies are seen more to "underpin the business of language learning... [and] are called 'indirect' because they support and manage language learning without (in many instances) directly involving the target language" (p. 135).

Under *direct* strategies Oxford (1990) lists:

- Memory strategies – assisting with information storage and retrieval, and include grouping, using imagery, repetition
- Cognitive strategies – assisting with comprehension and production of language, and include practising, analysing and reasoning
- Compensation strategies – allowing use of the language notwithstanding gaps in L2 knowledge, and include guessing and gesture

Under *indirect* strategies are listed:

- Metacognitive strategies – allowing learners to control their cognitive learning processes, and include planning and self-evaluation
- Affective strategies – helping to control motivation and attitude, and include steps taken to lower anxiety and encourage oneself
- Social strategies – helping learners to improve through interaction with others, and include asking questions, taking active roles in the classroom and seeking practice opportunities

In the same year, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) also came up with a classification system that while overlapping considerably with Oxford's (1990), also differed in some key areas, highlighting different opinions as to how strategies should be classified. O'Malley and Chamot saw strategies belonging to three broad categories: *cognitive*, *metacognitive* and

socio-affective. Important differences occur in certain areas, often, it appears, to do with theoretical approach. For example, O'Malley and Chamot list 'guessing' as a cognitive factor, while Oxford sees it as a compensatory factor and, as opposed to O'Malley and Chamot, Oxford proposes that memory strategies have specific functions and so separates them from the cognitive category. Also, Oxford separates social strategies from affective ones, and in doing so is able to list strategies more exclusively.

2.7.3 Compensatory strategies – language learning or language use?

As discussion looks set to continue regarding learning strategies, and how they might be classified, one classification in particular seems to attract attention – compensatory strategies. It appears that most researchers and authors when discussing speaking strategies, do so on a quite specific level and, generally, refer to the area as *communicative strategies* (Bygate, 1987; Cohen, 1990; Macaro, 2001; Cook, 2008), regardless of the confusion this term can have with regard to writing strategies. Kellerman, Bongaerts and Poullisse (1987) propose that the common ground with all communication strategies is that they all compensate for missing knowledge. Cohen (1990, p. 56) also mentions that as “these communication strategies compensate for deficits the speaker may have, they have been referred to as *compensatory strategies*”.

The reason speaking strategies - as opposed to those used for reading, writing and listening - have been singled out for particular examination here might be explained further by Macaro (2001) who reminds us of the debate over whether learning strategies can even encompass communicative strategies. This argument, Macaro suggests, is based on the distinction between language competence (a learner's knowledge of the language) and language performance (a learner's ability to use the language in order to communicate). Macaro proposes that communication strategies are actually strategies that compensate for a lack of competence, and in doing so can enhance performance and are used by learners “because they greatly improve the quality of a conversation even if they don't improve the quality of the speaker's L2” (p. 112). The question that is raised here is whether these communicative, compensatory strategies pertain to language learning, or language use, or both.

There appears to be a degree of overlap among the discussions regarding this question. Macaro (2001), for example, proposes that even compensatory strategies might demonstrate

“some pretty nifty advanced metacognitive strategies” (p. 111) which points towards an intertwining of strategies, and strategy classifications, that assist with speaking production. Others share a similar view, such as McDonough (1995) who cites work by Tarone (1977, 1980, 1991) who differentiated communication strategies from those for perception, production and learning, but goes on to propose that while these strategy categories might have varying purposes they are far from independent. For example, some communication strategies, such as *an appeal for assistance* for example, could very well act as both a communication strategy and a learning strategy.

Other researchers also agree that not all speaking strategies are actually strictly communicative strategies, or that these are in fact compensatory. Rubin and Thompson (1994), for example, look at very specific problems encountered by learners. While some strategies they suggest to assist with these problems are communicative in nature, and some compensatory, some are also to do with metacognitive, social and affective factors – strategies that are suggested specifically to help the learners learn, not to immediately help them communicate in an interactive situation. The following common language learning problems, and their suggested strategies, are supplied below in order to illustrate how various language learning strategy classifications might be inclusive of speaking strategies. The examples are adapted from a more comprehensive list by Rubin and Thompson (1994, pp. 100-109) but the suggested classifications in brackets are this author’s own:

- **I have poor pronunciation**
 - Ask your teacher how certain sounds are formed (social/interactive)
 - Make a list of words that give you trouble and then practise them (cognitive)
- **I make the same mistakes over and over again**
 - Try to understand why you make the same types of error (self evaluation – metacognitive)
 - Determine how much error is tolerated in the L2 (planning for a language task – metacognitive). Native speakers are frequently tolerant of L2 users’ problems with pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary (Fitzgerald, 2003).
- **It disturbs me when I am corrected – I lose my rhythm and make mistakes**

- Negotiate with your teacher when you want errors corrected (social)
- **I have few opportunities to speak English**
 - Perform every class activity (paying attention – metacognitive and/or social)
 - Interact with classmates (social)

In a similar fashion, Oxford (1990, pp. 324-327), listed a comprehensive set of strategies which include strategies that were not merely to do with the act of communication in an interactive situation. What Oxford does is to list the strategies under the groups that had been identified earlier – memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social. Strategies clearly linked to assisting with spoken L2 production, but not always specifically aimed at interactive situations (apart from compensatory strategies which all appear to be interactive in nature) include:

- *Memory* – placing new words in context; representing sounds with images
- *Cognitive* – practising by repeating or recombining formulas and patterns
- *Compensation* – switching to the first language (L1); using mime or gesture; getting help; avoiding communication; approximating the message; coining words; using circumlocution or synonyms
- *Metacognitive* – paying attention in class; organising; setting goals and objectives; planning for a language task; self monitoring and self evaluating
- *Affective* – lowering anxiety by using laughter; rewarding oneself; writing a language learning diary
- *Social* – asking for correction or information; cooperating with peers; developing cultural understanding; being aware of others' thoughts and feelings

This all-encompassing and inclusive view of the nature and type of learning strategies, used by learners to assist with spoken communication, is an attractive one as it includes communicative compensation strategy classifications, and acknowledges their status as learning strategies. Perhaps this suggests, at least partially, that language use strategies might

increase confidence through practice, thereby improving communicative competence, and in doing so become a part of the learning process.

2.8 Strategy research to date

Strategy research to date appears to have centred on, firstly, what the strategies are, and secondly, whether successful acquirers of L2s differ in their strategy use from less successful learners, or whether they merely use the same strategies, or a mix of strategies, more efficiently (Chamot, 2005). These studies have been complemented by further research that looks into what factors affect strategy use, for example personality, or individual learning styles (Goh & Foong, 1997). When attempting to correlate strategy usage with successful L2 acquisition however, there is some disagreement over strategy use between successful and unsuccessful learners (Vann & Abraham, 1990). It is also debatable how many strategies are available to L2 learners, and also how these should be classified, although it does appear clear that the effective use of learning strategies correlates with successful L2 acquisition (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002) and that more successful learners are adept at consciously choosing strategies that suit their particular learning styles (Ehrman, 1990, and Oxford, 1995, cited in Hsiao & Oxford, 2002).

2.8.1 Creating better learners

One of the prominent and most important shifts in strategy research over the years has been a move away from a focus on strategies themselves, to a focus on the learners, as it became increasingly obvious that there might be a correlation between strategy use and achievement (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). Oxford (1990) had earlier proposed that:

Strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence. (p. 1)

Lessard-Clouston (1997) states that not only do learning strategies assist with the development of communicative competence, research has shown that they also help to create better L2 learners. It seems reasonable to assume that a better language learner will, in turn, have a better chance of being a better communicator. Apart from unalterable learner traits such as age and intelligence, it does appear that there are few traits, styles or approaches that

cannot be positively altered, improved, taught, or taken advantage of. It is hoped that by focusing on these possibilities, better learners can be created (Brown, 2007; Ellis, 1994/2002; Griffiths, 2008; Lightbown & Spada, 2000; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford & Crookall, 1989; Reiss, 1981; Rubin, 1975).

2.8.1.1 Motivation and aptitude

Lightbown and Spada (2000) believe that teachers have a good opportunity to influence learner characteristics that correlate with high motivation:

If we can make our classrooms places where students enjoy coming because the content is interesting and relevant to their age and level of ability, where the learning goals are challenging yet manageable and clear, and where the atmosphere is supportive and non-threatening, we can make a positive contribution to students' motivation to learn. (p. 34)

If high motivation is a factor that correlates with successful learning, then similarly, successful learning can correlate with high motivation and “the process of creating successful learning which can spur high motivation may be under the teacher's control” (Cook, 2001, p. 118).

2.8.1.2 Learning strategies and learner autonomy

An introduction to new learning strategies, or instruction on how students can use learning strategies they already possess more effectively, are ways teachers can assist learners by giving them a degree of autonomous control over their learning (Grenfell, 1999). Wenden (1987, p. 8) refers to this autonomous learner concept as “self-directed learning”. Grenfell says that good learners have some degree of control over their learning – an understanding of their learning process and the ability to make certain decisions that will positively affect their learning. He states that “good language learning is about increasing autonomy. In fact, someone cannot be a successful language learner and not also be an autonomous language learner” (1999, p. 35). Cook (2001, p. 129) appears to agree, noting that poor students “are those who depend most on the teacher and are least able to fend for themselves” and adds that

“learner training” can help learners to become more independent, both in and out of the classroom, by explaining strategy use that they can use to guide their own learning.

Increasing motivation, encouraging learner-centred teaching and efficient strategy use are examples of how creating better learners can be achieved. However, even considering these many, varying methods of improving the learning process, Grenfell (1999, p. 38) states: “...describing the end product is not the same as prescribing the means to get there”. The notion of good language learners, coupled with an understanding of the interlinking contributions of personality and individual learning styles, and the learners’ individual use of language learning strategies, has led to the emergence of a shift in the teaching and learning process. This concept of “learning to learn” sees the teacher’s role move from straight language training, to showing the learners how they can better help themselves to learn (Grenfell, 1999, p. 50). In this way the responsibility to improve falls just as squarely on the learner as it does on the teacher, with the teacher’s role subtly moving to that of a learning facilitator. Pachler (1999) proposes that:

As teachers we cannot learn for our learners, but we can provide an environment conducive to learning, both by appropriately and effectively structuring the teaching process as well as by ensuring an appropriate atmosphere enabling the learner to become cognitively and affectively involved and ‘active’. (p. 80)

Therefore, firstly the teacher needs to facilitate the students’ self-improvement by supplying a motivating environment and perhaps, as Reiss (1981) suggests, directly or indirectly raise the students’ awareness of their own individual learning styles, having the students add to, or improve their use of, a broad range of learning strategies.

However, how strategies should be taught is a matter of much discussion. A popular notion appears to be that strategy instruction should be seamlessly integrated into the normal L2 instruction, as and when it is needed, or deemed appropriate (Grenfell, 1999). This approach appears to be most successful when “tied to the language tasks that students are normally expected to accomplish and when strategies are explicitly taught” (Chamot, et al., 1999; Oxford & Leaver, 1996, cited in Hsiao & Oxford, 2002, pp. 370-371), although the extent to which a learner can become more successful, and exactly how strategy instruction should be implemented is difficult to identify (Grenfell, 1999).

2.9 The case for continued study into language learning strategies

Despite the large body of research with regard to successful language acquisition and its relationship with strategy use and strategy instruction, it is clear that, while promising, the results thus far are not conclusive. Still, much has been learned from previous studies of successful learners. For example, that successful learners are active and involved participants in the classroom; that more proficient learners appear to use a wider range of strategies for more reasons; that learners are often unaware of the strategies they use; that there is evidence of gender, age and ethnic differences in strategy usage; that learners with different learning styles use different strategies; that successful learners use strategies to help them stay focused in the classroom (Oxford & Crookall, 1987). We have also learned that successful learners use affective strategies which predispose them to learning, which might identify an inseparability of learning and motivation. However, even this conclusion poses further questions, for example: do successful learners, or learners making progress, feel good about their target language and culture (Oxford & Crookall, 1987; Macaro, 2001)? In fact, many such questions remain pertaining to strategy use still exist – questions, for example, as varied as seeking clarification towards strategy classifications, or the effects of factors such as motivation, learning style or learning context. Still more might be asked regarding the appropriateness, value and methods of classroom-based strategy instruction.

Chamot (2005) makes a strong case for research into language strategies, used and learned in context, stating:

...by examining the strategies used by second language learners during the language learning process, we gain insights into the metacognitive, cognitive, social and affective processes involved in language learning...The second reason supporting research into language learning strategies is that less successful language learners can be taught new strategies, thus helping them become better language learners. ...Strategy instruction can contribute to development of learner mastery and autonomy and increased teacher expertise, but additional research in specific language learning contexts is essential to realizing its potential to enhance second language acquisition and instruction. (p. 112)

Considering a need for continued research into learner traits and learning processes that might contribute to successful language learning, Ushioda (2008) makes the following observation with regard to the ideal context, and who might be best placed to contribute:

...actual classroom-based studies of motivational events and processes and of good language learners in this situated framework remain surprisingly few in number. Undoubtedly, the key players who have potentially much to contribute here are teachers and learners themselves. Teachers are ideally positioned to undertake research on motivation in their own classrooms – research that is sensitive to local needs and conditions, that is shaped by clear pedagogical aims and principles, and that can contribute to teachers' own professional development as well as to professional knowledge at large...Above all, research insights from learners themselves in a variety of learning contexts are much needed to substantiate and inform our theorizing, particularly in relation to the socially situated growth and regulation of motivation. (p. 29)

From these observations, it could then be surmised that there are sound reasons to continue, and even increase, research into the use of language learning strategies and how they might best be introduced to language learners. Foremost among those reasons might be to create more successful, more autonomous learners, while at the same time developing more effective, learner-focused teachers. As the use of language learning strategies appears to be largely dependent on the individual learner, it might also be useful to conduct studies that are contextually specific, as this could help to isolate strategy usage within particular learning environments, and with particular learner types. Finally, it seems possible that one of the most effective ways of conducting such studies might be by involving those who most stand to benefit – language teachers, and language learners.

Chapter Three - Research Methodology

3.1 Research methods for this study

The overall intent of this study was to assess and improve learning strategy awareness in such a way as to improve the learners' L2 acquisition and spoken production. The research itself was designed around the concept of strategy instruction being part of the students' normal learning process. In this way, the students were given the opportunity to improve their learning by gaining an understanding of the nature of learning strategies and their role in the learning process. In order to make the most of this research opportunity various methods of data acquisition, and their procedures, were considered. A description of the participants, justifications for the choices made, explanations of the actual research procedures as undertaken, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study are set out below.

3.2 Participants

The participants for this study were a class of my own students who were attending an international college in China. This particular class was undergoing IELTS training, IELTS being the International English Language Testing System, which is a globally recognised, official method of determining acquisition and performance levels of English as a second or foreign language.

This class consisted of twelve students, all 17 - 18 years of age. There were two females, and ten males, Korean, Chinese and Thai. The school itself was a Cambridge examination centre, conducting IGCSE (the Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education) classes and examinations in English, in all subjects. The students were motivated to use English as their L2 for these lessons, and were undergoing IELTS training either for this reason, to generally improve their language skills, or to train for formal IELTS examinations which would take place at some time in the near future for those students looking to continue their studies at universities where English is the main language of communication. All students had been undergoing a similar amount of English training as a school subject since childhood.

In order to gauge approximate L2 proficiency levels, the class was given an Oxford Quick Placement Test (QPT) – Test One, which tests reading only – at the beginning of the semester (September 2009), which is designed to provide a score that falls within a range of IELTS band scores. IELTS measures from Band 1 (virtually no usable English) to Band 9 (near perfect, or native user level). For example, a student who scored 29 from a possible 40 in the QPT would be considered to have a probable IELTS level between 4 and 4.5. Overall, the results from this test fell between IELTS levels from 3 to 5. As an IELTS trainer and EFL teacher for several years, I believed the QPT to have recorded generally low results, and judged the students to likely be capable of achieving between one and two band levels higher than these results in an official IELTS examination. Their speaking and listening skills in particular, were excellent, and all could easily communicate at a conversational level in English. Mid-semester and end-semester mock IELTS tests showed estimated IELTS listening scores between 5.0 and 8.0, and speaking scores between 5.5 and 7.5, which correlated with the initial assessment of low-value QPT results. To put these levels in perspective, western universities (e.g. New Zealand, Australia, Canada, UK, USA) commonly require an average IELTS level of 6.0 – 6.5 across the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking before considering L2 user applications for placement.

In addition to these twelve students two young female Chinese teachers, both in their mid-twenties, were soon an addition to the class. Keen to partake in the lessons, it was proposed to them that in order for their participation in the class to have meaning to them, and relax the original students, they would take full part in the class as students, their teacher role left at the door for the duration of the lesson. This was accepted by both the teachers and the students, and as the learning goals of these two teachers was identical to the students in the class, they were swiftly accepted as peers and this relationship continued throughout the semester. Their level of English was similar to the mid/higher level students in the class, and this, combined with their motivation to learn, and their relative youth, retained a good level of homogeneity with the group as a whole.

I had twelve participants for the main questionnaire (nine male and three female – the original class), fourteen participants for the focus groups (two female and four male in one group, and six males and two females in the other – the class, plus the two teachers), and six participants for the interviews (two female and four male – other participants approached

were not keen to participate, or unavailable). The participants were invited to take part in the research processes under the strict ethical guidelines as outlined in detail in Section 3.6.

3.3 Choosing a research approach

In order to obtain the most useful data – that is, data that would ultimately be beneficial to the learner/participants, to my teacher colleagues, to myself as a teacher and teacher trainer – it appeared that either a strictly quantitative or qualitative study would not prove sufficient. While it was necessary to obtain some statistical evidence of strategy use, it was preferable that any assessment of strategy use among the learner/participants also included their own input and opinions. After choosing between an experimental, and non-experimental approach, the main two traditions of research, quantitative and qualitative, were investigated to identify their individual benefits. The intention was to establish what other researchers have suggested: “that even greater strength can come from their appropriate combination” (see Gorard & Taylor, 2004, p. 1).

3.3.1 Experimental and non-experimental research

Because of its occasionally disruptive nature, experimental research is not often used in classroom settings, but it can be, and is valued by some as a method of showing cause-effect relationships. A case in point was a study, similar to this one, undertaken by O’Malley et al. (1985) where a group of learners were given strategy training (proposed as *cause*), while a second, and separate control group was not, and any differences or improvements over the control group were seen as *effect*. It seemed reasonable to assume in such a case that the control group could be disadvantaged by being denied special instruction, and for this reason a non-experimental research method for my own research was preferred.

3.3.2 Quantitative research

Creswell (2008, p. 46) describes quantitative research as “a type of educational research in which the researcher decides what to study; asks specific, narrow questions; collects quantifiable data from participants; analyses these numbers using statistics; and conducts the inquiry in an unbiased, objective manner”. Gorard and Taylor (2004) refer to quantitative

research as being a process of counting and measuring, and McKay (2006) explains that those using quantitative research typically have a quite specific research question at the outset and that the reality found can be broken down into parts and studied. Typically, the data is numerical, often in response to a test, or survey, and is analysed statistically. The role of the researcher is to observe objectively, and measure, without influencing the subject of the study (Sale, Lohfield & Brazil, 2002). With a goal of this research being an assessment of strategy use among the participants, a form of quantitative measurement was therefore required as it was important to learn not only what types of learning strategies were being used, but how often. The countable, numerical data obtained through quantitative measurement might also be analysed in a comparative manner between participants, strategy classifications, and individual strategies themselves. Being an objective form of measurement, it would also be assumed that the data obtained was as free from external bias as possible.

3.3.3 Qualitative research

Qualitative research, on the other hand, constructs a situation where the researcher and participants are linked interactively and the findings of the study are then “mutually created within the context of the situation which shapes the inquiry” (Sale, et al., 2002, p. 45). Qualitative inquiry, being a subjective approach, relies on the views of the participants and the meaning they attach to their education, (Creswell, 2008). Rather than analysing numerical data, patterns are looked for that might have evolved over time, often from smaller numbers of participants, and interpretations are derived from the data that might have been gained through use of a number of methods such as interviews, focus groups, field notes or written documents (McKay, 2006). The attraction of obtaining such qualitative data lay in this interpretive aspect – not only the interpretations and conclusions that I might be able to draw from the data obtained, but the value of the opinions of the participants themselves towards their own learning processes and their interactions with others within the learning context and environment.

3.3.4 The Mixed Methods Approach

With the research goal being to both assess, and obtain opinion on, the use of learning strategies, it was decided to adopt a *mixed methods* research design. This procedure uses both

quantitative and qualitative research methods for collecting and analysing data, respectively yielding information that could be statistically analysed, along with perspectives from the participants themselves. The assumption was that by combining both methods a better understanding of the research problem might be reached than by using either of the methods on their own (Creswell, 2008; Gorard & Taylor, 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Suter, 2006; Walford, 2001), and that it would prove the most likely method of providing useful answers (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This goal of understanding, whereby empirically obtained data is supported by the voices of the participants of the study, is viewed by others as “both philosophically and practically sound” (Sale, et al., 2002, p. 51). Importantly, Wellington (2000) proposes that even small-scale studies such as the one undertaken for this thesis, support the use of the mixed-methods approach.

3.3.5 Triangulation

To further enhance the perceived advantages of the mixed methods approach, triangulation was employed, whereby both the quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, and the findings merged giving equal priority to both (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Creswell, 2008; Isaac & Michael, 1997; Scott & Morrison, 2006; Wellington, 2000). The intention of this study was aligned with Cohen, Manion and Morrison’s (2000) view that mixed method triangulation can offer researchers a measure of confidence in their findings due to the elimination of bias possibly inherent in single-method approaches. Furthermore, as Wellington (2000) suggests, triangulation can be accomplished by corroborating data interpretations with the participants’ own views and opinions, which assisted with ensuring the data collection was as interactive and inclusive as possible.

3.4 Research validity and reliability

Once the mixed methods/triangulation approach had been decided upon, the data collection tools and procedures were scrutinised to ensure that the data collected was both valid and reliable, in other words that it was both meaningful and consistent (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). The objective here was to employ research instruments that measured what they set out to measure, and allowed the researcher to draw good conclusions from the information acquired (Charles & Mertler, 2002; Cohen, et al., 2000; Creswell, 2008; Muijs, 2004).

3.5 Instruments used for data collection

Triangulation was employed using four data collection methods. Two questionnaires were given, the first being based on Oxford's (1990) simple background questionnaire (Appendix E), the second being the *Strategy Inventory for Language Learners* (Appendix F), or SILL (Oxford, 1990). These questionnaires, combined with structured observations, formed the quantitative inquiry of the research and were integrated with the qualitative processes of interviews and focus groups.

3.5.1 Background questionnaire

The background questionnaire was designed to provide personal information from the participants that would add meaning to the far more detailed data obtained from the SILL, interviews, focus groups, and observations. The information sought involved L2 learning experience, and motivational issues, such as the importance and purpose for learning the L2.

3.5.2 SILL – Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

Oxford's (1990) SILL questionnaire, designed to assess language learning strategy use, is perhaps still the most famous (Macaro, 2001), although by no means the only questionnaire of its type. Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) cite several strategy rating scales such as Bialystok (1981), Politzer (1983), McGroarty (1987), Chamot et al.(1987) and Bedell (1993), which, while purporting to have obtained interesting data with regard to strategy use, still appear to have some drawbacks:

Few of [these] instruments have any published reliability or validity data. This was the key reason the SILL was developed. If the psychometric properties of reliability and validity have not been explored, it is impossible to know whether we can put faith in the results of the research. (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995, p. 4)

Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) state that the SILL was originally designed to assess learning strategy usage among English-speaking foreign language learners at a language institute in California. In 1990, an amended 50 item version specifically for use in ESL/EFL situations was developed and published. This version has been widely used worldwide for major studies, dissertations and theses, as much for its ease of use and data analysis properties as it

is for its having been extensively checked for reliability and validity (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995).

The SILL consists of four sections – the questionnaire, answer sheet (Appendix G), a result profile sheet (Appendix H), and a strategy classification description sheet (Appendix I). The participants are requested to answer the questionnaire, enter their results on the worksheet, and then fill out their own strategy use profile.

The SILL is organised into six strategy groups, which are categorised according to Oxford's (1990) original identification and classification system, but are sometimes listed on the category description sheet, and the work and profile sheets slightly differently (as shown below in *italics*):

- Part A: Memory strategies (*remembering*) – 9 items, covering strategies such as grouping, imagery, structured reviewing.
- Part B: Cognitive strategies (*mental processes*) – 14 items, the largest strategy group with the greatest variety, covering practice-related strategies, and deep processing by which learners analyse new information and monitor comprehension (Nolen, 1988).
- Part C: Compensation strategies (*compensating*) – 6 items, with strategies such as guessing meaning from context (especially when listening with regard to this paper), and using gesture or synonyms to convey meaning when language is limited.
- Part D: Metacognitive strategies (*organising*) – 9 items, including strategies such as paying attention, planning language tasks, seeking out practice opportunities, self-evaluation.
- Part E: Affective strategies (*managing feelings*) – 6 items, covering strategies such as anxiety reduction, and self encouragement and reward.
- Part F: Social strategies (*learning with others*) – 6 items, including asking questions, cooperating with peers, becoming culturally aware.

The participant has to consider each item (a strategy) and then rate them on a five-level Likert scale, which Cohen, et al. (2000) describe as providing a range of possible responses. The SILL's Likert scale consists of:

1. *Never true of me*
2. *Usually not true of me*
3. *Somewhat true of me*
4. *Usually true of me*
5. *Always true of me.*

The participants are asked to indicate a response, 1 through 5, to each item, all of which represent strategy descriptions. For example, under Part A, “I use new words in a sentence so I can remember them”, or from Part D, “I pay attention when someone is speaking English”. As seen above, the 50 items are not evenly distributed for each part, as certain classifications of strategies are deemed to possess a greater variety of possible approaches. For example, Part B (cognitive strategies) contains 14 items, while Part C (compensatory strategies) contains only 6 items.

Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995, p. 6), when discussing *utility*, describe it as: “the usefulness of an instrument in real-world settings for making decisions relevant to people’s lives”. As the research for this paper was to be classroom-based, with my own students as participants, this concept was viewed as a priority. The research that was undertaken was intended not only to shed light on knowledge that would have a practical purpose for me as their teacher, but also to be a learning experience for the students. Searching the literature for previous studies using the SILL identified that this questionnaire, while not perfect (Macaro, 2001), does indeed have utility (see Park, 1997; Wharton, 2000). In fact, the SILL’s most commonly used venue has been the classroom, with the main goal being to identify relationships between strategy use and language performance. Should a strong relationship between these two variables be identified, then perhaps language performance can be improved through strategy training designed to enhance strategy use among L2 learners.

Reliability for the SILL has been measured through actual use on many occasions (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995) using the Cronbach alpha scale, which is a measure of internal consistency, and has shown levels of reliability from very high, to very respectable at the least, and it has been proven that measurement error is minimal when administering the SILL under a variety of conditions and situations, either translated into the participants’ L1, or given in the L2. Similarly for validity, Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) state that validity for

the SILL as a strategy instrument is provided by a number of studies in which the frequency of strategy usage is related to L2 performance.

3.5.3 Conducting the SILL

Certain issues had to be considered and dealt with for the SILL to be a useful instrument for this research, and for the process to be an enjoyable learning experience for the participants. Burns (2000) had suggested that the complexity of questionnaires could be problematic. The participants had to understand the questions to give accurate responses, so it was important that the questionnaire items would not be misinterpreted, or be ambiguous or vague. Furthermore, the participants' motivation for answering questions in a particular way could be questionable. For example, as the participants were also my students, it had to be assumed that some answers might be made specifically to please me, or not.

The first consideration then, was that of presenting the SILL in its English version – the L2 being learned by this group of students. This issue was resolved through my intimate knowledge of the participants, and their individual levels of English, which I considered at a stage that could easily cope with a careful and detailed explanation of the questions and the strategy classifications. Time was taken prior to the questionnaire's actual completion to go over the SILL, the worksheet and strategy classification sheet, in detail, introducing the concept of learning strategies and discussing them. Only once we had reached a consensus that the SILL, its purpose and its meanings, were understood was the questionnaire completed. I was present while the questionnaire was completed in order to answer any possible queries. The motivational issue was dealt with during these discussions with the explanation that there could be no right or wrong answers with the individual items and, therefore, no expectation on my part for any particular result.

3.5.4 Conducting the focus groups

The focus groups were to be group discussions designed to rely on the interactions within the group, introducing various attitudes and opinions (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). Focus groups were warranted for this mixed methods research approach, as more often than not they are used in conjunction with other methods, such as questionnaires, in order to add meaning to that data (Wellington, 2000; Wilson, 1997). Furthermore, as Scott and Morrison (2006)

proposed, focus groups are useful in learning why participants hold the opinions they do, and Hatch (2002) recommends them as providing different information from individual interviews due to their interactive nature. Focus groups were also deemed as useful due to other advantages proposed by Kitzinger (1995): that they might encourage participation by those participants who might be intimidated by individual interview scenarios; that they might encourage responses from participants by relaxing them, and that they might help participants to explore and clarify their own viewpoints. Most importantly perhaps, focus groups have the ability to empower participants as they become an active part of the research analysis (Morgan, 1996).

Focus groups, however, are not without their pitfalls, and these had to be considered along with other issues that could negatively affect their validity and reliability. Scott and Morrison (2006) mention the possibility of focus groups being in danger of being negatively affected by reluctant or overbearing participants. Cohen, et al. (2000) state that more than one focus group must be undertaken to ensure that the results of the discussion are not unique to that particular group. It is also preferable that the participants should share similar characteristics and experiences (Hatch, 2002), and be of a size that allows all participants a chance to partake in the discussion, while being large enough to provide a useful range of perspectives (Ary, et al., 2002).

When conducting the focus groups for this study, these issues were given a high degree of priority. The class of twelve split themselves into two groups of six. The participants' ability to choose their own group was a positive factor towards their comfort and confidence. From a researcher's point of view, the participant placements within each group was not of major concern – a mix of nationalities was guaranteed no matter the placements, and the participants were largely homogenous in terms of age, proficiency, learning context and experience. The two female students joined one group, and due to a logistical basis that suited their timetable, the two female teachers joined the other group. There was no querying of this placement by any participant, and the result was one group of six, and one group of eight, with two females in each group.

These group sizes were considered ideal in terms of the issues mentioned above and formed the basis of lively discussions which were each held over one normal 45 minute lesson. The prospect of group take-overs by overbearing contributors was countered by the general nature

of the participants, combined with an atmosphere of mutual respect engendered from the beginning of the semester. The fact that the focus groups were to be recorded had been discussed in detail, as had issues of anonymity, to the satisfaction of all participants.

3.5.5 The questions

The questions for the focus groups were predetermined and focused in order to gather information relevant to this study (see question list with explanation in Section 4.2). The questions were the same for both focus group and interview, with the responses from one designed to support the responses from the other. In this way, the participants would have already discussed the questions at some length during the focus groups, heard various ideas with regard to the topics, and then have the opportunity to answer them again, without fear of interruption, in a more considered way.

The questions were based on Oxford's (1990) post-SILL discussion question suggestions. The questions were discussed in class beforehand and input invited as to their design and meaning. Focused discussion took place, especially with regard to possible question overlap and question wording, an exercise that allowed participant ownership of the research process to take place. At the same time, as suggested by Kitzinger (1995), it engaged the participants, developing an interest in the actual question design that would better allow expression of attitudes and opinions towards topic areas that were of personal interest to them.

3.5.6 Conducting the interviews

As soon as practicable, following the focus groups, the qualitative interviews were conducted. In line with Creswell's (2008) description, open-ended questions were asked of the participants which again asked them to explain their answers, by doing so adding depth to the data via their individual experiences. Combining interviews with focus groups was also deemed as justified due to Kvale's (1996) suggestion that they are a discussion of views that utilises interaction for the production of knowledge, and that they add a further social dimension to the overall collection of data.

In order to obtain the best possible quality of responses from the participants, two interview formats were originally considered. Informal, or unstructured interviews, which had no

predetermined questions (Kvale, 1996), could possibly lead to unexpected responses, but could also introduce comparative difficulties between the individual responses, as the participants might be asked different questions (Knox & Burkard, 2009). The decision to use the same questions for the interviews as for the focus groups then led to the use of semi-structured interviews (Cohen, et al., 2000) which use open-ended questions, designed before the interviews take place. These questions, in combination with the focus groups, were focused on obtaining specific information that would be comparable across the group of participants. The slightly limited flexibility with the questioning was considered to be offset by this comparability which would assist with the final organisation and analysis of the data obtained.

The individual interviews were held immediately after the focus groups. From the group of twelve, I received six positive responses and individual interviews were undertaken with these participants – four male, and two female. As the questions had already been discussed at length in the focus groups, the individual participants now found they had the time to voice their opinions again, in a more considered manner and, once relaxed, felt comfortable in setting out their attitudes and giving valid and complex reasons for them. This method and environment minimised issues such as preconceived interviewer expectations, and misunderstandings on the parts of both the interviewer and participants as to what was being explained, and what was being asked. Cohen, et al. (2000) propose that eliminating such sources of bias might be a practical method of maximising validity with interview instruments, and the quality of the responses obtained has therefore added depth and meaning to the data obtained.

3.5.7 Conducting the observations

The final method for data acquisition was in the form of quantitative, structured observations, which were considered an effective method of assessing communication strategies in particular. In accordance with a description by Cohen, et al. (2000), these observations were to use a schedule devised beforehand and a system called *event sampling* by which a tally was to be kept of the strategies as they occurred.

Not all strategies are directly observable. Many strategies, for example, are mental processes, taking place in the learner's mind. Communication strategies, however, looked to be entirely

observable. The first task therefore, was to compile a list of what might be deemed “observable” strategies, and this was done by selecting from Oxford’s (1990) list which recorded strategies under the six strategy classifications. The strategies deemed observable are listed below:

Compensation strategies:

1. Switching to the L1
2. Getting help
3. Using mime or gesture
4. Avoiding communication partially, or totally
5. Selecting the topic
6. Adjusting or approximating the message
7. Coining words
8. Using circumlocution or synonym

Metacognitive:

1. Delaying speech production to focus on listening

Affective:

1. Lowering anxiety using laughter
2. Self-encouragement by taking risks wisely
3. Discussing your feelings

Social:

1. Cooperating with peers
2. Cooperating with proficient users of English

The opportunities to conduct the observations occurred during the focus groups, interviews and also during a mock IELTS speaking test that was to be done as part of normal class

activity. This was discussed with, and accepted by, the participants before being completed. As the strategies being measured, apart from gesture, were all identified through listening, the recordings and transcripts of these activities could be used repeatedly. This negated the potential difficulty of my reliance on a one-off observation, taking place in real time, during the performance of the alternative data collection procedures. A concern with the observed behaviours being context-specific was minimised by the observations being undertaken in three different circumstances, which altered the contexts in which the strategies might be used.

3.6 Ethical considerations

With the intention originally being to conduct research inviting my own students to be participants in that research, my role of teacher/researcher raised conflict of interest issues, along with issues of power/authority, both of which are, rightly, considered to be factors that could negatively affect the students, the work they were aiming to complete, and the goals they were attempting to achieve. As an experienced and conscientious teacher, I was highly aware of these issues and took all possible precautions to ensure that the welfare of my students would not be negatively affected in any way. My students, their successful learning, and their enjoyment of my classes were always considered of the utmost importance.

Before, and during, the teaching semester and the conduct of the research, and in order to obtain permission from the university, and the placement school, to conduct that research, the following were taken into consideration:

1. Studies such as the one I proposed are a respected and popular method of strategy research, recommended by leading authorities in this field (Chamot, 2005).
2. The research was based on my giving strategy instruction and analysing the results. Strategy instruction is an important part of my normal teaching methods and has been found, in my own experience, and the experience of other teachers and researchers, to yield positive results for the learners.
3. The research itself would in no way have any effect on the students' grades in my class, or any other class they are taking at the school, apart from a hopeful improvement in their L2s as a natural course of the strategy instruction. This was an

IELTS training class only, with no formal testing and grading throughout the semester. Any testing was seen as practice testing only, for the sake of experience, with real IELTS testing only being available at outside, formal testing centres. The aims of the class were to improve their L2s, and to learn examination skills that would assist them if or when they decided to take the formal IELTS examination outside of the school. The research was deemed a learning process which would in fact help, rather than hinder, the students achieve these goals.

4. No research results would be analysed, used, or written up formally until I was no longer teaching the class and, in fact, back in New Zealand for the February - June 2010 semester.
5. The research questions, in all formats, are completely non-threatening as a result of their general intent. All lengths were taken to ensure complete understanding on the part of the students of the purpose of the research, and the meaning of all research questions that would be asked in all formats and approaches. In the unlikely event where loss of meaning might take place regardless of the measures taken, it would not engender harm to the students in any way, only result in less accurate or complete data.
6. All possible steps were to be taken to ensure, to the greatest possible degree, confidentiality for all participants both during the research period, and permanently afterwards.
7. The issue of power/authority, whereby I, as the participants' teacher, might seek results that would reflect favourably on me and my performance, was nullified as there are no right or wrong results with this type of research, no right or wrong answers to the questions and, therefore, no preferential results that I might seek, need, or want. Furthermore, the strategy use profiles do not reflect in a negative way on the learners – they are merely looked at in context to see how the students go about their learning, effectively meaning that there are neither good, nor bad, strategy profiles.
8. The participant invitations were carried out, as required by the Auckland University of Technology (AUT), by a colleague at the school who had no teaching contact with the students in any way. The students understood that participation in any sections of the research was purely voluntary, and would have no effect on their standing in the

class, or any results from that class, or have any effect whatsoever on their relationship with me as their teacher. The students were welcome to participate in all, some, or none of the research process. The Participant Information Sheet given to all students can be seen in Appendix A.

9. No research, using any method, was to be conducted without the express permission of AUT, the students themselves, or the administration of my host school, and all the proper AUT consent and participant information forms were used at all times.

With the overall aim of language learning strategy research being to create more successful learners, this study was designed to be conducted, to the highest degree possible, as a natural part of the participants' natural learning process for the semester – a process of strategy introduction, designed to identify language learning opportunities for the participants. The study was intended to be inclusive and encouraging for the learners, and no learner, or group of learners, was to be disadvantaged or discouraged by any part of the research process.

Chapter Four - Methods of data analysis and presentation

4.1 Analysing results from the SILL Questionnaire worksheet

The results from the SILL questionnaire are able to be analysed in a number of ways, with data being grouped into the six strategy usage classifications listed below. For example, data is provided from which comparisons can be made by individual, gender, or country of origin.

- Part A - *Remembering* (memory)
- Part B - *Cognitive* (using mental processes)
- Part C - *Compensating* (making up for missing knowledge)
- Part D - *Metacognitive* (organising and evaluating learning)
- Part E - *Affective* (managing feelings)
- Part F - *Social* (learning with others)

Each participant completes an answer sheet (Appendix G) which utilises a Likert scale (1 = *never true of me* to 5 = *always true of me*) given by individual participants for each of the 50 items on the questionnaire. These are totalled for each part, A to F, and the sum is divided by the number of items in each part. This supplies a number (calculated to 2 decimal places) between a possible lowest score of 1, to a possible highest score of 5, for each of the six parts. This figure represents the strategy usage for each part. The following sheet is where the participants work out their profile of results (Appendix H) using the results they have calculated from the worksheet. Oxford (1990, p. 300) supplies a guide by which strategy usage can be calculated:

Table 4.1 Results profile key (adapted from Oxford, 1990, p.300)

Strategy Usage Results Profile Key		
High	Always or almost always used	4.5 to 5.0
	Usually used	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	Sometimes used	2.5 to 3.4
Low	Generally not used	1.5 to 2.4
	Never or almost never used	1.0 to 1.4

From each mean calculated by the participant, they are then able to create their own graph as a visual representation of their current strategy use. A complete set of the graphs can be seen in Appendix K for each participant. Comparisons by gender and ethnicity, and an overall group result are shown in Chapter 5.

The complete set of data includes:

- the Likert rating for each SILL item from each participant (referred to as P1 to P12), from 1 to 5
- the sum of these scores for each of the six parts
- a strategy usage average which has been calculated from the sum for each participant for each part
- an overall average strategy usage score for each participant calculated over all six parts
- a line graph which displays the strategy usage over the six parts

From this information further calculations were made in order to identify patterns and trends:

- a mean calculated from the Likert ratings from each participant for each SILL item
- a standard deviation, or SD (which shows how much deviation there is from the mean, both above and below the average), calculated for each SILL item across all participants

- a overall mean calculated from the Likert sum ratings for each participant and its attendant standard deviation, which gives an overall figure averaged over the entire group
- a overall mean calculated from the strategy usage averages for each participant

An example, Part A (memory strategies) only, is shown below. The entire calculation sheet can be seen in Appendix J. The SILL items (seen under Part A) are listed by mean – highest to lowest.

Table 4.2 Part A (Memory strategies) Likert ratings and strategy usage levels

Part A	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Mean	SD
1	3	2	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	4	4	3.33	0.65
9	1	2	3	4	4	1	4	4	4	4	5	2	3.17	1.34
2	1	2	2	2	4	1	2	2	4	5	3	4	2.67	1.30
4	3	1	1	4	4	3	1	2	4	3	1	2	2.42	1.24
3	2	1	1	2	2	4	1	1	2	3	2	3	2.00	0.96
8	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	3	2	4	2	2	2.00	0.85
7	1	1	5	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	3	1.75	1.22
5	1	1	1	3	1	1	2	2	1	1	3	1	1.50	0.79
6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1.17	0.58
Sum	15	12	19	24	22	17	17	21	22	25	22	24	20.0	4.02
Usage	1.67	1.33	2.11	2.67	2.44	1.89	1.89	2.33	2.44	2.78	2.44	2.67	2.22	0.45

The complete table allows initial analysing in terms of:

- Comparing individual and overall strategy usages - see Usage, which gives a strategy use level for each participant from a possible 1 – 5.
- The overall means – for Part A: 20 from the sum total scores, and 2.22 from the calculated usage ratings
- The standard deviation (SD) from the mean usage value. For example, SILL items that show a large range of strategy usage by the participants - see SD 1.34. This highlights individual participants rating this particular SILL strategy, Item 9: “*I remember new words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on a board, or on a street sign*” from as low as 1 (P1 and P6), to as high as 5 (P11). This

shows a remarkable difference in how that particular strategy is used, or seen as important, by various participants.

- The overall standard deviation (SD), which gives an idea of overall variance in usage for individual strategies within this particular strategy classification, and can be compared with the overall SDs for the other five strategy classifications. The higher this figure, the more likely it is that some participants posted a higher overall usage score for this classification, while others rated it lower. A lower overall SD, on the other hand, reflects more agreement amongst the participants in terms of strategy usage within that particular strategy classification.
- Which strategies (questionnaire item numbers) are seen as important, and which are not, in a graded scale (as listed by overall, group mean from high to low), the item/strategy numbers appearing on the left in order of that importance.

These results, using the usage figures as highlighted above, were then graphed by individual, country of origin, gender, and overall usage for all participants. Once this basic raw data from the SILL had been compiled and tabulated, it was then time to run t-tests and correlation calculations which might highlight trends and identify results where differences were statistically significant. The statistics software programme SPSS for Windows (version 16.0, 2007) was used for all statistical calculations in the following sections.

4.1.1 The Paired samples T-test

A paired t-test is a quantitative procedure for determining the statistical significance between the means of two sets of scores (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009) and is done by computing the difference between the two chosen variables for each case, and then testing to identify whether the average difference is significantly different from zero. In the case of this study, the variables can be described as the six strategy classifications as used in the SILL questionnaire (see Parts A to F in Appendix F).

The purpose of the t-test, therefore, was to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the mean rating on any pair of strategy classifications, from a total of fifteen possible strategy pairings among the six strategy classifications (e.g. remembering/mental processes; compensating/learning with others). The t-test tested the null

hypothesis, that of equality, whereby for example, the mean usage for *remembering* equals the mean usage for *mental processes*. The probability that the mean for one strategy classification in the pair is the same as the mean for the other is then given as a 'p value'.

Because 15 hypotheses are being made with this test, from a 0.05 (1 in 20) significance level, there was a high probability of identifying false statistical significance, therefore the Bonferroni correction had to be employed whereby the normal 0.05 significance level is divided by $n = 15$, the number of tests. The ensuing result is a significance level (p value) of 0.0033 being required.

4.1.2 Spearman's rho correlations

The next step was to examine correlations between the variables to determine whether there were any significant statistical relationships between them. This was done using a calculation called Spearman's Rho, which is a correlation coefficient. This is a statistical test for correlation between two scales that have been ranked in order of value, and provides a measurement of the interdependence, or relationship, between the items on those scales (Corty, 2007).

4.2 Analysing results from the focus groups and interviews

The focus groups and semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to obtain data that could be compared with the SILL data and identify supportive comparisons, or anomalies. The questions were also designed to identify the participants' attitudes and opinions regarding learning strategy usage. The type of information that was hoped for is detailed below in italics:

1. Which language strategies do you use the most and think are the most effective?

To match the participants' current strategy usage from the SILL and identify reasons for this usage.

2. Are there some strategies that are in the questionnaire that you think might help you become a better language learner?

To make an initial link with the concept of strategy training – will the participants identify areas that they can see as possibly having a positive effect on their learning?

3. Do you think that increased motivation might change the strategies that you use?

Linked to question 2, this was hoped to identify participant attitudes to their current strategy use and match them to changes to their learning habits that they might personally see as beneficial should a greater measure of urgency be placed on their learning. The scenario of an imminent, official IELTS test was used as an example of a motivational factor.

4. Do you think that people who have different reasons for learning to speak English might use different strategies?

This question was designed to turn the focus towards communication strategies more specifically, identify the level of participant understanding of the topic, and identify participant attitudes and opinions towards the possible links between strategy use and the purpose of learning.

5. Do you think that people from different countries might use different learning strategies?

Aimed mainly at learning challenge differences between Asian and western countries this hoped to identify participant understandings of their own learning and communicative challenges.

6. Do you think that males and females might use different learning strategies?

To identify levels of awareness in personal learning strategies as compared with those of the opposite sex.

4.2.1 Representing the results from the focus groups and interviews

The first three questions were deemed as the most important with regard to the specific aim of this study, with the final three being included to ascertain further opinion and strategy awareness, and to prompt further discussion on the topic in general as an exercise. The focus groups and interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed upon return from China. The responses to Questions 1 -3 were then tabulated under each of the six strategy classifications,

and colour-coded in order to visually represent opinion groupings under these classifications and question types. The tables are shown and discussed in Chapter 5.

4.3 Observations of focus groups, interviews and practice oral tests

The final data collection made was an attempt to make observations of communication strategy usage from the opportunities offered via the focus groups, interviews and practice speaking tests. The observed strategies were classified and counted as they were used. Individual charts were created that record the strategy counts for the focus groups, interviews and tests and then combined to form an overall count table, shown and discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five - Findings and discussions

5.1 The SILL

The initial results for this study were the qualitative data obtained from the SILL and are presented below.

5.1.1 Overall strategy usage for the group

The graph below represents the SILL findings for strategy usage averaged over all 12 participants, from a possible lowest ranking of 1, to a highest possible of 5, as per the Likert scale as previously mentioned:

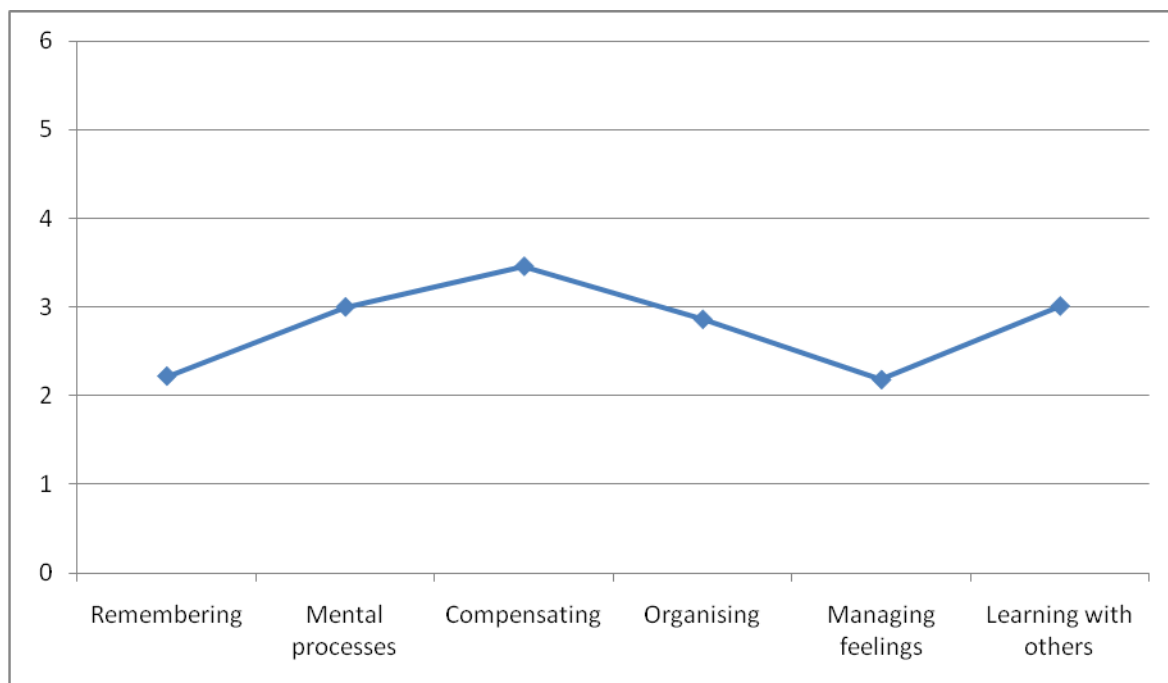


Figure 5.1 Average strategy usage for all participants by classification

The graph shows that the most commonly used strategy by the participants was *compensating*, which at an average of 3.46 on the Likert scale, is just under the 3.5 threshold for high usage, or *usually used*. *Mental processes*, *organising* and *learning with others* all fall near, or on, the 3.0 level, which shows medium level usage, or *sometimes used*. *Remembering* and *managing feelings* appear to be the least used strategies, both with levels at just over 2.0, which shows them as being in the low level category, or *generally not used*.

The Likert rating totals, their SILL usage ratings, means and standard deviations are shown in the abbreviated table below:

Table 5.1 Abbreviated SILL strategy usage results

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Mean	SD
Part A	Memory/Remembering													
Sum	15	12	19	24	22	17	17	21	22	25	22	24	20.00	4.03
Usage	1.67	1.33	2.11	2.67	2.44	1.89	1.89	2.33	2.44	2.78	2.44	2.67	2.22	0.45
Part B	Cognitive/Mental processes													
Sum	30	28	44	46	50	38	36	47	50	46	44	45	42.00	7.35
Usage	2.14	2.00	3.14	3.29	3.57	2.71	2.57	3.36	3.57	3.29	3.14	3.21	3.00	0.52
Part C	Compensating													
Sum	19	23	21	18	23	19	20	21	23	21	18	23	20.75	1.96
Usage	3.17	3.83	3.50	3.00	3.83	3.17	3.33	3.50	3.83	3.50	3.00	3.83	3.46	0.33
Part D	Metacognitive/Organising and evaluating learning													
Sum	22	15	29	34	32	17	26	21	32	34	20	27	25.75	6.66
Usage	2.44	1.67	3.22	3.78	3.56	1.89	2.89	2.33	3.56	3.78	2.22	3.00	2.87	0.74
Part E	Affective/Managing feelings													
Sum	9	8	15	15	21	13	6	10	21	12	13	14	13.1	4.64
Usage	1.50	1.33	2.50	2.50	3.50	2.17	1.00	1.67	3.50	2.00	2.17	2.33	2.18	0.77
Part F	Social/Learning with others													
Sum	16	12	24	23	21	14	17	14	24	12	20	20	18	4.50
Usage	2.67	2.00	4.00	3.83	3.50	2.33	2.83	2.33	4.00	2.00	3.33	3.33	3.01	0.75
Mean	2.27	2.03	3.08	3.18	3.40	2.36	2.42	2.59	3.47	2.89	2.72	3.06		

5.1.2 T-test

Using the means supplied from these overall results, the t-test was then carried out looking for significant statistical differences between the 15 possible strategy classification pairs. The t-test mean as shown below is the difference between the overall SILL means for each pair (e.g. *remembering* = 2.22 and *mental processes* = 3.00 which gives the Pair 1 mean below as -0.78).

Table 5.2 Paired samples t-test results

		Mean	SD	t	df	P value
Pair 1	Remembering more effectively / Using all your mental processes	-0.78	0.24	-11.09	11	0.000
Pair 2	Remembering more effectively - Compensating for missing knowledge	-1.24	0.55	-7.77	11	0.000
Pair 3	Remembering more effectively / Organising and evaluating learning	-0.64	0.52	-4.3	11	0.001
Pair 4	Remembering more effectively / Managing your feelings	0.04	0.64	0.216	11	0.883
Pair 5	Remembering more effectively / Learning with others	-0.79	0.69	-3.93	11	0.002
Pair 6	Using all your mental processes / Compensating for missing knowledge	-0.46	0.56	-2.82	11	0.017
Pair 7	Using all your mental processes / Organising and evaluating feelings	0.14	0.54	0.89	11	0.395
Pair 8	Using all your mental processes / Managing your feelings	0.82	0.51	5.56	11	0.000
Pair 9	Using all your mental processes / Learning with others	-0.01	0.64	-0.07	11	0.944
Pair 10	Compensating for missing knowledge / Organising and evaluating learning	0.6	0.76	2.71	11	0.020
Pair 11	Compensating for missing knowledge / Managing your feelings	1.27	0.73	6.03	11	0.000
Pair 12	Compensating for missing knowledge / Learning with others	0.45	0.81	1.9	11	0.084
Pair 13	Organising and evaluating learning / Managing your feelings	0.68	0.69	3.4	11	0.006
Pair 14	Organising and evaluating learning / Learning with others	-0.15	0.7	-0.75	11	0.472
Pair 15	Managing your feelings / Learning with others	-0.83	0.6	-4.81	11	0.001

When comparing the means of the overall SILL results, if the p values above are less than 0.003, there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the two variables. If the significance value (p) is higher than 0.003, there is no statistically significant difference. For example, a measurement of $p = 0.000$ (as highlighted) identifies the probability that the two means of Pair 1 (*remembering* and *using mental processes*) being the same is close to zero. This then reflects the SILL overall results graph above which shows a usage level of

2.23 for *remembering* and 3.00 for *using mental processes*. Alternatively, the result for Pair 9: *using mental processes* and *learning with others* is significantly higher, at $p = 0.944$, which suggests a high probability that the means of the two variables will be the same, or very nearly, which reflects the SILL result for that pair as seen in Table 5.1 above, which show both strategies rating at, or near, 3.0. The table below shows those pairings of strategies where the null hypothesis that the means are equal, is rejected ($p < 0.003$). That is to say, there appears to be some statistically significant difference in the level, or degree, of strategy use across the group of participants for the following pairs of strategies:

Table 5.3 Pairings for which $p < 0.0033$

		Mean Pair1- Pair2	SD	t	df	p value
Pair 1	Remembering more effectively / Using all your mental processes	-0.78	0.24	-11.09	11	0.000
Pair 2	Remembering more effectively - Compensating for missing knowledge	-1.24	0.55	-7.77	11	0.000
Pair 3	Remembering more effectively / Organising and evaluating learning	-0.64	0.52	-4.3	11	0.001
Pair 5	Remembering more effectively / Learning with others	-0.79	0.69	-3.93	11	0.002
Pair 8	Using all your mental processes / Managing your feelings	0.82	0.51	5.56	11	0.000
Pair 11	Compensating for missing knowledge / Managing your feelings	1.27	0.73	6.03	11	0.000
Pair 15	Managing your feelings / Learning with others	-0.83	0.6	-4.81	11	0.001

These pairings all include the strategy classifications *remembering* or *managing feelings* both of which scored significantly lower overall usage results than the other four SILL strategy classifications, showing usage means of 2.22 and 2.18 respectively.

5.1.3 Spearman's Rho correlations

The Spearman's rho correlation calculation was then made in order to examine the relationship between the strategy pairs. A strong positive correlation would indicate that participants who score highly in one strategy are likely to also score highly in the other of the pair. At the same time, participants who put a lower value on the former strategy are likely to also record a low score for the latter strategy in the pair.

Table 5.4 Spearman's Rho Correlations

Spearman's Rho - Correlations		Rem. more eff.	Use ment. proc.	Comp.	Org. and ev.	Man. feel.	Learn with others
Remembering more effectively	Correlation coefficient	1.00	.73**	.05	.72**	.58*	.29
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.007	.88	.008	.05	.36
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12
Using all your mental processes	Correlation coefficient	.73**	1.00	.32	.66*	.72**	0.44
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.	.32	.02	.008	.15
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12
Compensating for missing knowledge	Correlation coefficient	.05	.32	1.00	.13	.23	.03
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.88	.32	.	.70	.48	.92
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12
Organising and evaluating your learning	Correlation coefficient	.72**	.66*	.13	1.00	.58*	.50
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.02	.70	.	.05	.10
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12
Managing your feelings	Correlation coefficient	.58*	.72**	.23	.58*	1.00	.78**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.05	.008	.48	.05	.	.003
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12
Learning with others	Correlation coefficient	.29	.44	.03	.50	.78**	1.0
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.36	.15	.924	.10	.003	.
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12
** Correlation is significant at the .01 level							
* Correlation is significant at the .05 level							

Several statistically significant high correlations appear in these findings, as can be seen above, mainly in the blue-highlighted sections. For example, the results show that *managing feelings* correlates highly with *learning with others* ($r = .78$, $p = .003$). This means that overall, as the scores for *managing feelings* increase, so too do the scores for *learning with others*, while at the same time those participants who scored *managing feelings* in the lower ranges will tend to also tend to record a low score for *learning with others*.

As an example, the correlation between *managing your feelings* and *learning with others* is shown in the figure below where the trend for either a low or high rating for both strategy classifications can be seen in the result groupings:

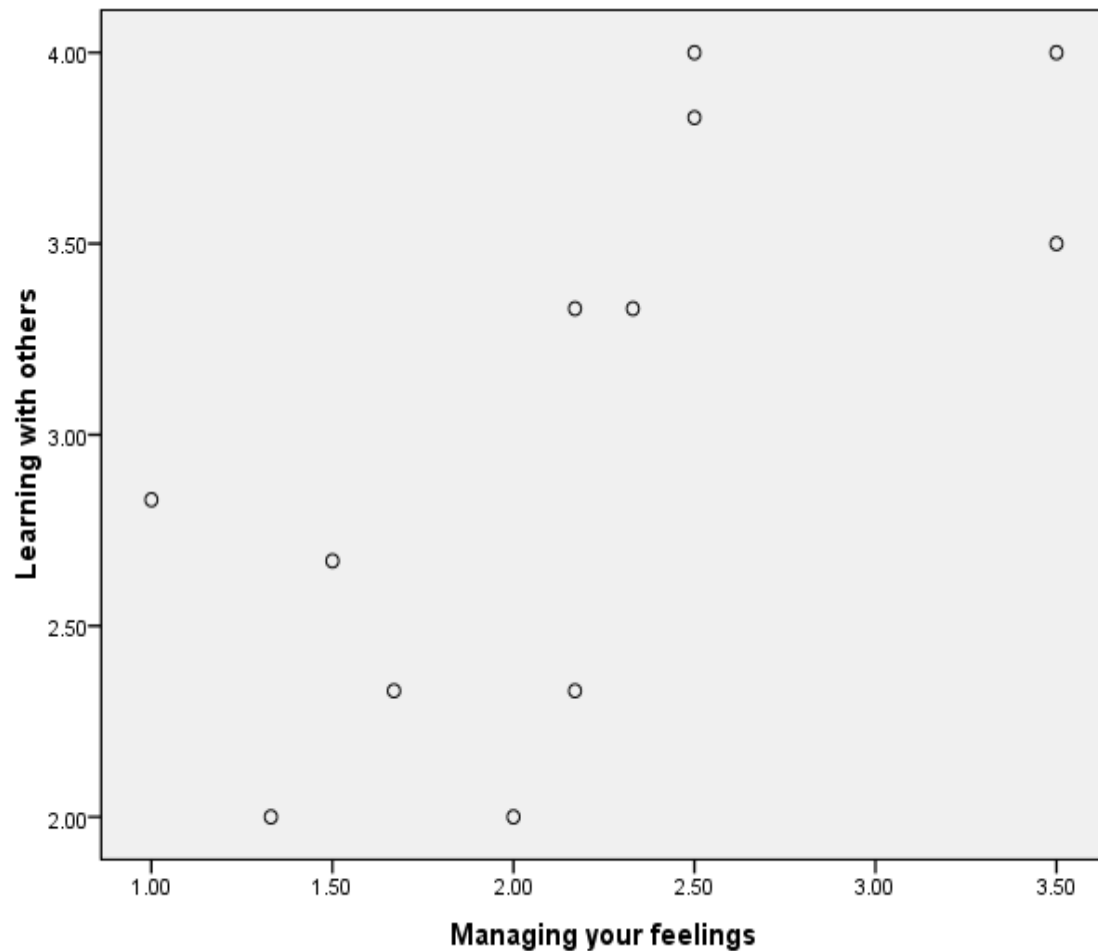


Figure 5.2 Scatter plot of *managing feelings* vs. *learning with others*

It is also noticeable from the overall results that there is no evidence of any strong correlation between *compensating for missing knowledge* and any other strategy classification. This is mainly due to the fact that the standard deviation for compensation was much less than those of the other strategy classifications which suggests a high level of agreement among the participants in the usage levels for compensation strategies.

5.2 Results by strategy classification

The following results are presented and discussed in terms of the six SILL strategy classifications.

5.2.1 Compensation strategies

Table 5.5 Compensation strategies (SILL Part A) – overall usage

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Mean	SD
Use	3.17	3.83	3.50	3.00	3.83	3.17	3.33	3.50	3.83	3.50	3.00	3.83	3.46	0.33

The SILL compensation items all appear to be either oral communication strategies, or able to be viewed as such. As the need to communicate has been established as the main purpose for language, and that the common ground between communication strategies is that they tend to compensate for missing knowledge, it is perhaps not surprising that compensation strategies have been found to be the most widely used by this group of participants from the six possible strategy classifications (mean = 3.46).

The highest rating compensation strategies, which all participants scored at 3.0 or above, also registered the lowest overall standard deviation (SD = 0.33) which reflects a small variability in the use of this strategy classification among the participants.

5.2.2 Cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies

Table 5.6 Overall strategy use for mental processes (M), organising and evaluation (O) and learning with others (L) – (SILL Parts B, D, and F)

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Mean	SD
M	2.14	2.00	3.14	3.29	3.57	2.71	2.57	3.36	3.57	3.29	3.14	3.21	3.00	0.52
O	2.44	1.67	3.22	3.78	3.56	1.89	2.89	2.33	3.56	3.78	2.22	3.00	2.87	0.74
L	2.67	2.00	4.00	3.83	3.50	2.33	2.83	2.33	4.00	2.00	3.33	3.33	3.01	0.75

The SILL items for the cognitive, metacognitive and social strategy classifications shown above all register in the medium level, or *sometimes used*. Respectively, these are strategies for mental processing (mean = 3.0) which assist with the comprehension and production of language, strategies for planning and self-evaluation (2.87) which control the learning process, and strategies that involve interactively learning with others (3.01) as opportunities to practise and improve the L2.

Taken overall the mean usage results suggest that the participants place virtually equal importance on these three strategy classifications. The t-test pairings show: *mental processes / learning with others* ($t(11) = -0.07, p = 0.944$); *mental processes / organising* ($t(11) = 0.89, p = 0.395$); *organising / learning with others* ($t(11) = -0.75, p = 0.472$) where there is no significant statistical difference if the significance value (p) is greater than 0.003.

However, there is also evidence that while this is apparently true, the high SD figures, especially for the metacognitive and social strategies ($SD = 0.74$ and $SD = 0.75$ respectively), suggest the participants vary widely in the importance they place on individual items for these strategy classifications. For example, the metacognitive strategies of planning and evaluation show a range of usage from a low (generally not used) of 1.67 (P2) to a high (usually used) of 3.78 (P10). Similarly, learning with others scores between a low of 2.00 (P2) and a high of 4.00 (P3 and P9). This seems to suggest that although there is a reasonable degree of homogeneity in this group of twelve participants in terms of age, ability and learning purpose, there are actually significant differences among the individuals in the way they approach their learning in terms of individual strategy use.

These varying approaches can be clearly seen in the SILL Strategy Usage Results table (Appendix J). An example from that table is shown below and highlights the varied levels of importance placed on each item by the participants P2 and P3, as mentioned above, for the SILL items listed for *learning with others*:

Table 5.7 P2 and P3 Likert ratings for social strategies (Part F - learning with others)
where 1 = never true of me, and 5 = always true of me

Item (SILL strategy)	P2	P3
45.	1	4
46.	1	3
47.	5	4
48.	1	5
49.	3	4
50.	1	4
Total / 30	12	24
Usage	2.00	4.00

Even with participants who record an equal overall usage for a strategy classification can be seen to attain that rating via some quite individual scores for each SILL item within that classification. An example of this can be seen below, where only Item 49 is given the same rating by the two participants, but the overall rating is identical:

Table 5.8 P11 and P12 Likert ratings for social strategies (Part F – learning with others)
where 1 = never true of me and 5 = always true of me

Item (SILL strategy)	P11	P12
45.	4	3
46.	3	4
47.	5	3
48.	3	2
49.	4	4
50.	1	4
Total / 30	20	20
Usage	3.33	3.33

Comparisons such as these can be seen throughout the SILL results and tend to belie the overall results which must, therefore, be seen only as a general guide towards strategy usages for the participants.

What is perhaps most important to note at this stage is that these strategy usage results do not appear to correlate significantly with the participants' L2 performance, proficiency or competence. For example, at the time of this study, participants P2 and P3 shared very similar levels of L2 proficiency, yet show significantly different approaches to their learning with regard to their overall strategy usage, in this case 2.03 (low overall usage) and 3.08 (medium overall usage) respectively. This would tend to suggest that, in this case at least, there a lack of correlation between strategy use and L2 proficiency.

5.2.3 Memory and affective strategies

Table 5.9 Overall strategy usage for remembering (R) and managing feelings (M)

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Mean	SD
R	1.67	1.33	2.11	2.67	2.44	1.89	1.89	2.33	2.44	2.78	2.44	2.67	2.22	0.45
M	1.50	1.33	2.50	2.50	3.50	2.17	1.00	1.67	3.50	2.00	2.17	2.33	2.18	0.77

The strategy classifications *remembering* and *managing feelings* both registered significantly lower in usage than the other four strategy classifications already discussed. The strategy items for *remembering* were rated quite consistently low by the participants, as illustrated by the comparatively low *SD* figure of 0.45. Only three participants (P4, P10 and P12) rated memory strategies in the medium range, or *sometimes used*, with the other participants rating in the low range, or *generally not used* or *never or almost never used*. The comparatively low usage is reflected by the t-test *p* values which show significant differences (where $p < 0.003$) between the mean usage of memory strategies when compared with the means of the other strategy classifications: *remembering* / *mental processes* ($t(11) = -11.09, p = 0.000$); *remembering* / *compensating* ($t(11) = -7.77, p = 0.000$); *remembering* / *organising* ($t(11) = -4.30, p = 0.001$); *remembering* / *learning with others* ($t(11) = -3.93, p = 0.002$).

This significantly low level of reported memory strategy use would appear to agree with the notion that the popular view of Asian learners relying heavily on rote learning is both stereotypical and misguided (Kember, 2000; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001). It does, however, appear to contradict the importance of memory strategies with regard to vocabulary retention required for improved L2 production.

A closer inspection of the group SILL results for memory strategies appears to at least partially explain this apparent contradiction. As with the complete SILL results table the SILL items (questionnaire statements) are listed in order of highest to lowest mean:

Table 5.10 Part A (Memory strategies) Likert ratings and strategy usage levels

Part A	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Mean	SD
1	3	2	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	4	4	3.33	0.65
9	1	2	3	4	4	1	4	4	4	4	5	2	3.17	1.34
2	1	2	2	2	4	1	2	2	4	5	3	4	2.67	1.30
4	3	1	1	4	4	3	1	2	4	3	1	2	2.42	1.24
3	2	1	1	2	2	4	1	1	2	3	2	3	2.00	0.96
8	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	3	2	4	2	2	2.00	0.85
7	1	1	5	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	3	1.75	1.22
5	1	1	1	3	1	1	2	2	1	1	3	1	1.50	0.79
6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1.17	0.58
Usage	1.67	1.33	2.11	2.67	2.44	1.89	1.89	2.33	2.44	2.78	2.44	2.67	2.22	0.45

The top four items show reasonably high overall usage among the participants, and are the types of memory strategies that might be expected with L2 learners at this level – for example using imagery to remember new words, or using them in context. However, the other items, which include using rhymes, flashcards and physically acting out in order to remember new vocabulary, might be expected with elementary L2 learners, but are less likely to be strategies used by L2 learners at this level. This finding suggests that the overall ratings for *memory* strategies might be negatively affected by the individual items that are offered by the SILL, and their relevance to the participants.

Table 5.11 Part E (Affective strategies) Likert ratings and strategy usage levels

Part E	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Mean	sd
40	3	3	3	4	5	3	1	4	5	3	4	3	3.42	1.08
39	1	1	4	2	5	3	1	1	5	3	3	3	2.67	1.50
42	2	1	3	3	5	4	1	1	5	1	1	1	2.33	1.61
41	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	2	3	2	2	4	1.83	1.03
44	1	1	3	3	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1.75	0.75
43	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.08	0.29
Sum	9	8	15	15	21	13	6	10	21	12	13	14	13.08	4.64
Usage	1.50	1.33	2.50	2.50	3.50	2.17	1.00	1.67	3.50	2.00	2.17	2.33	2.18	0.77

The overall low ratings for the affective strategies which are used to manage feelings (*manage feelings/mental processes* ($t(11) = 5.56, p = 0.000$; *manage feelings / compensating*

($t(11) = 6.03, p = 0.000$; *manage feelings / learn with others* ($t(11) = -4.81, p = 0.001$, where $p < 0.003$ shows significant difference between the pairs' usage means), such as controlling stress or anxiety, might also be partially explained by the SILL item choices the participants are given to register their usage levels for. The three top rating strategies involve self-encouragement to take risks while speaking English and noticing stress and trying to relax when speaking English. Strategies such as these could reasonably be expected with L2 learners at this level who are not always overly confident, but are still keen to communicate especially through speaking. The other three strategies, all of which rated considerably lower - recording feelings in a diary, giving oneself a “treat” when doing well, and talking to others about how one feels when learning English – do not appear to be particularly valid for this group of participants, and they rated them accordingly. As with the memory strategy item choices in the SILL, some of the item choices for affective strategies might not be relevant for these participants, resulting in lower overall usage.

5.2.4 Individual participant strategy use

The table below summarises the SILL Likert ratings for each participant and each strategy classification, showing the overall mean strategy usage score in the blue row. The individual results are also to be found in graphical format in Appendix K which clearly display the extent of the individuality of the participants' learning approaches:

Table 5.12 Participant SILL results

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Remembering	1.67	1.33	2.11	2.67	2.44	1.89	1.89	2.33	2.44	2.78	2.44	2.67
Mental processes	2.14	2.00	3.14	3.29	3.57	2.71	2.57	3.36	3.57	3.29	3.14	3.21
Compensating	3.17	3.83	3.50	3.00	3.83	3.17	3.33	3.50	3.83	3.50	3.00	3.83
Organising	2.44	1.67	3.22	3.78	3.56	1.89	2.89	2.33	3.56	3.78	2.22	3.00
Managing feelings	1.50	1.33	2.50	2.50	3.50	2.17	1.00	1.67	3.50	2.00	2.17	2.33
Learn with others	2.67	2.00	4.00	3.83	3.50	2.33	2.83	2.33	4.00	2.00	3.33	3.33
Mean	2.27	2.03	3.08	3.18	3.40	2.36	2.42	2.59	3.47	2.89	2.72	3.06

The individual SILL results show eight of the twelve participants to have registered strategy usage overall scores within the medium, or *sometimes used* range – between 2.5 and 3.4 inclusively. The other four participants registered between 2.03 and 2.42, all of which register within the low usage range, or *generally not used*. No participants registered overall strategy

usage levels within the high ranges of 3.5 to 5.0, or within the very low range, *never or almost never used*, from 1.0 to 1.4. However, as seen above, ratings for individual strategy classifications frequently fell within these ranges, with P1, P2, P6 and P7 in particular registering some low scores for *remembering* and *managing feelings*. These four participants also recorded the four lowest overall strategy usage ratings, all within the low level of *generally not used*. High level scores were recorded for many of the participants across the classification ranges apart from *remembering* and *managing feelings*. These two strategy classifications were almost universally reported as low, or low medium, usage levels, apart from P5 and P9 who recorded significantly higher ratings (high level 3.5 in both cases) for *managing feelings* than all the other participants.

These results would appear to correlate with the t-test results which record some statistically significant difference in the level of strategy use across the group for the following strategy pairs:

- *Remembering* with *mental processes*, *compensating*, *organising* and *learning with others*
- *Managing feelings* with *mental processes*, *compensating* and *learning with others*

Referring then to the Spearman's Rho correlations further justification can be found within individual participant scoring for the strategy pairs that were found to have strong positive correlations. These correlations suggested that participants who rated one classification in the pair highly were also likely to score the other strategy classification in the pair highly, or alternatively, rate both classifications in the pair in the lower levels.

The pairs that returned significantly strong positive correlations are shown below

- *Remembering* and *organising* ($r = .72, p = .003$)
- *Remembering* and *mental processes* ($r = .73, p = .003$)
- *Managing feelings* and *mental processes* ($r = .72, p = .003$)
- *Managing feelings* and *learning with others* ($r = .78, p = .003$)

There does appear, therefore, to be an overall tendency with the participants, and their usage recordings with regard to these four strategy classification pairs, to either score low in both,

or high in both. These findings could tend to suggest that, for this group of individuals at least, those who do not consider themselves to use so many strategies for remembering (e.g. for vocabulary) are also not so concerned with the cognitive aspect of the learning process. Similarly, they might not consider strategies for organising their learning, or for self evaluation to be as important as other factors that affect their L2 acquisition. The opposite might be said to be true for those individuals who do use a higher level of memory strategies. Another suggestion could be made that learners who record higher levels of strategy usage that assists them to handle stress and anxiety, also view interactive learning strategies that involve learning with others as useful and important.

Two other observations can be made with regard to the individual SILL results as shown above. Firstly, even with such a small sample of participants, there is a significantly large variation in strategy use, not just with the overall scores, but within each classification, and this would tend to suggest a proportionate variety in individual learning styles, and approaches to their L2 acquisition. Secondly, there does not appear to be a correlation between L2 proficiency and the recorded strategy usages. Although there are no wide variations in L2 ability within this group of participants, P2, P6 and P7 could be referred to as advanced learners (IELTS levels 6.5 – 7.0), yet show some of the lowest overall rates of reported strategy use – 2.03, 2.36 and 2.42 respectively. Although no conclusion could be drawn from this study alone, this could appear to suggest that the conscious adoption of learning strategies might decrease as L2 proficiency reaches a certain advanced level.

5.2.5 Strategy use by country of origin

The breakdown for the participant group is six Korean, four Chinese and two Thai.

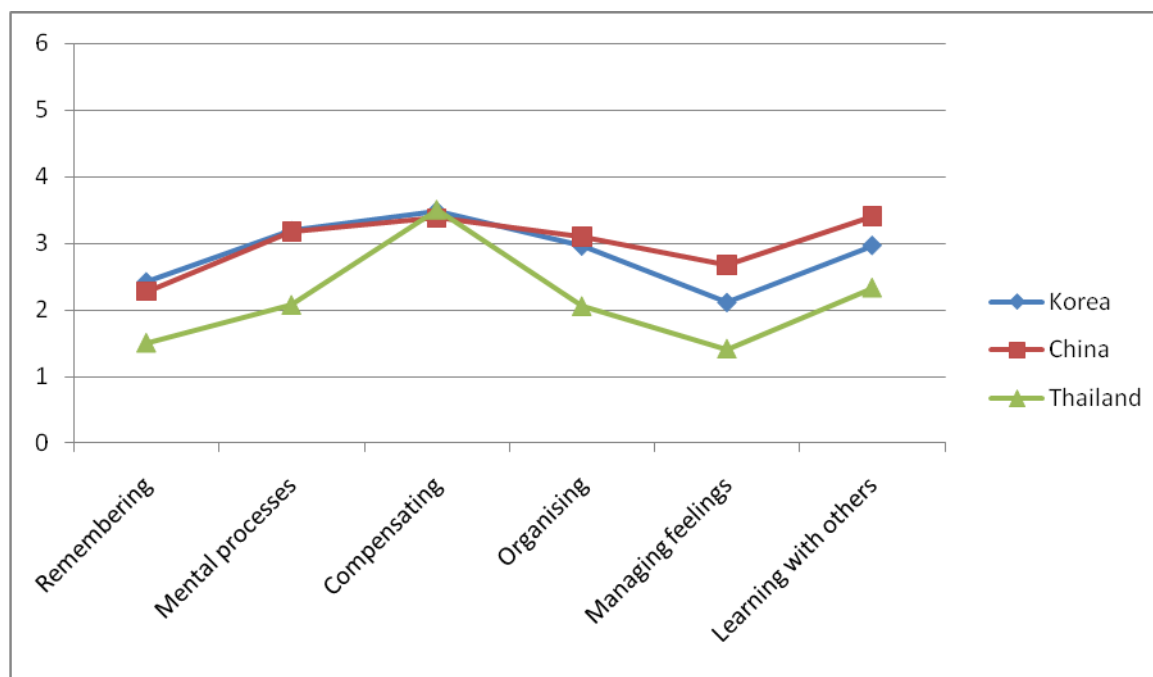


Figure 5.3 Strategy use by country of origin

Table 5.13 Strategy use by country of origin

	Korea	China	Thailand
Remembering	2.42	2.28	1.50
Mental processes	3.19	3.18	2.07
Compensation	3.49	3.38	3.50
Organising	2.96	3.10	2.05
Managing feelings	2.11	2.67	1.41
Learn with others	2.97	3.41	2.33
Mean	2.86	3.00	2.14

The sample size of this study is too small to form any definitive conclusions, but the findings represented above do appear to be significant enough to be reported. The Korean and Chinese learners appear to use very similar overall approaches with their strategy usage, and both report mean overall usage in the medium or *sometimes used* range. Their ratings are fairly consistent within this range across the strategy classifications, apart from visibly lower ratings for *remembering* and *managing feelings*. The Thai learners, however, report an overall strategy usage of 2.14 which is in the low or *generally not used* range. In fact, all of

their strategy classifications are within the low range apart from compensating strategies, which are heavily involved with the production of spoken English. This would then logically concur with the interactive *learning with others* strategies the Thai learners report as their next highest levels of use. That such differences in strategy use have been reported within a completely Asian and relatively homogeneous participant sample, could be of interest to future researchers. Again, however, the lower levels of strategy usage as reported by the Thai participants is not in any way reflected in lower levels of proficiency, as these participants are both at upper-intermediate or advanced levels.

5.2.6 Strategy use by gender

The breakdown by gender for the sample is three female and nine male.

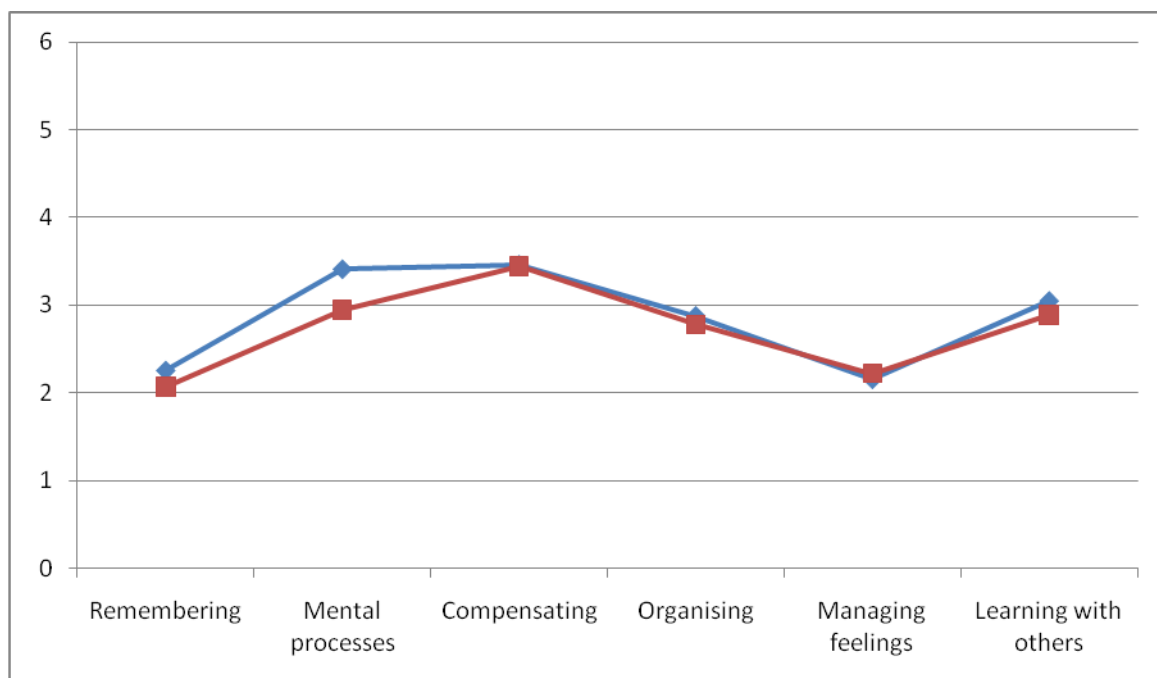


Figure 5.4 Strategy use by gender: blue diamond = male and red square = female

Table 5.14 Strategy use by gender – Overall Likert usage ratings and means

	Males	Females
Remembering	2.26	2.07
Mental processes	3.41	2.95
Compensation	3.46	3.44
Organising	2.88	2.78
Managing feelings	2.16	2.22
Learn with others	3.05	2.89
Mean	2.87	2.73

As with the results recorded by the participants' countries of origin, the small sample size negates any formal conclusions being drawn, but again, the findings appear to be significant enough to be included. The findings, which have not recorded major differences in strategy use between the genders, and do show a significant amount of similarity across all six strategy classifications, appear to be in direct contradiction to previous SILL studies undertaken around the world. For example, Green and Oxford (1995, p. 266) cite studies by Oxford and Nyikos (1989), Ehrman and Oxford (1989), Watanabe (1990) and Sy (1994), all of which showed distinct differences in strategy use between males and females. Such findings could suggest biological or social reasons for strategy use differences, or lack thereof, which could then affect teaching and learning strategies in the L2 classroom. This contradictory evidence, therefore, appears to suggest that further research in this area would be beneficial in order to establish greater clarity and accuracy, and to further establish ulterior reasons, such as locality or prior learning experience, which might affect strategy use results when measured by gender.

5.3 Focus groups and interviews

The tables below show summarised versions of the voiced opinions of the participants with regard to the first three focus group and interview questions. The participants are notated by their number (e.g. P10 = 10). The focus of each question is shown with its colour code below each table. The final three questions from the six are discussed separately. Grammatical errors are left unchanged and not notated as such in the quoted sections. The male pronoun is used for all participants to assist with anonymity. The second focus group was held to increase the depth of the comments, and also for comparison, and so is discussed separately.

Table 5.15 Focus Group 1 analysis – Questions 1 - 3

Strategy Classification	Expanation / Example
Remembering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (8) Memorising words and phrases and when they are used so they can be used appropriately • (9) Improve vocabulary • (11) Weak area so use context to remember vocabulary • (9,10,11) Improve vocabulary x 3 • (11) Reviewing in a structured way for tests
Mental processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (5) Skim and scan for meaning
Compensating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (10) Guessing meaning when listening • (14) Work to obtain meaning rather than being told – more effective
Organising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (11) Set goals and objectives to save time • (5) Be effective-scheduling what and when to study • (12) Too shy to learn with others so be better organised instead • (9) Plan a study schedule for effectiveness • (5) Plan to improve remembering • (14) Evaluate learning to see areas for improvement
Managing feelings	
Learning with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (9) Talk like English speakers-copy accent • (5) Compare to gauge level and set personal target • (14) Effective for slower learners by negotiating meaning with native speakers and classmates and evaluating mistakes • (12) Helps with vocabulary – context and appropriate usage • (8) Be corrected by native speakers x 2 • (10) Practise communicating with native speakers

- Question 1: Which strategies are currently used the most and thought most important?
- Question 2: Which strategies might help to become a better learner?
- Question 3: If motivation to learn increased, which strategies would be useful?
- (Numbers) represent individual participants

5.3.1 Focus group 1 - Question 1

What strategies do you use now and think are the most important?

With the SILL providing information regarding the strategies used by the participants with regard to the six strategy classifications, the focus groups and interviews provided individual opinions on why these strategies were used. For example, P8 sees memory strategies as more

than merely important methods to learn new words – the correct use of these words and phrases in context is also important:

P8 – “...when we learn a new language there’s a lot of words and phrases that you can use in different situations and different times, but if we can memorise them with effective way we can use it at correct situations...”

This opinion on the significance of memory strategies also appears to correlate with the highest scoring SILL items in the *remembering* classification which focus on context and relationships with prior knowledge, and include concepts of appropriateness.

Guessing meaning when listening was agreed as a useful compensating strategy, correlates with SILL items in this classification, and would appear to be a logical and useful strategy to aid with communication. P11 found it time-saving and, therefore, efficient to set goals and objectives when learning an L2. This strategy is listed as a SILL item, but did not find overall popularity among the participants according to the questionnaire results.

The most popularly discussed strategy classification was not the overall highest rated SILL classification of *compensating*, but the next highest - the interactive strategies involved with *learning with others* - and the opinions with regard to their use varied widely. P9 found it useful to speak with native speakers in order to copy their accent. P5, however, had a different opinion:

P5 – “...if we have the comparison we know what level we have and maybe we can take a different approach targets for ourselves and we try to get the target...”

This apparently very viable strategy is not listed as a possible strategy item in the SILL – it is an invention and opinion of the participant. Similarly, P12’s understanding that interactive strategies assist with the correct use of vocabulary, is also not a directly stated SILL strategy item. Both of these opinions might relate to the relevance of the available SILL items under the *compensating* classification, or point towards a shortage of suitable choices. However, P14’s view that “others” includes both classmates and native speakers, and that interactive learning is useful for slower learners, appears to be directly in line with SILL strategy items.

5.3.2 Focus Group 1 – Question 2

Were there strategies in the SILL that you thought might help you to become a better learner?

With a direct link to the concept of strategy training, the answers to this question identified both specific, and more general, areas for potential. Memory strategies, while being a low usage classification overall, were not viewed as without value, but as an area that needed attention especially for the specific reasons of improving vocabulary and using it correctly. Compensating strategies were also identified as suitable aids toward self-improvement:

P14 – [as opposed to a teacher explaining words or phrases] “...I think the most the more effective way is to tell to effectively to let us do and guess the meaning is probably so they can remember the words quickly and effective.”

Metacognitive organising and planning strategies were identified as areas which might be beneficial to L2 learning as well. The following two opinions with regard to these strategies highlight the individuality of the learning experience:

P5 – “...if we can our schedule to study, when to study and what to study like that it is more effective for us to improve, especially for language learning.”

P12 – “I think organising is very good for me. I’m very quiet voice so afraid to show my emotions to others and very hard to participate with others...”

These metacognitive SILL strategies include seeking opportunities to speak English and noticing mistakes when doing so, paying attention when being spoken to in English, looking for ways to be a better learner, setting goals and evaluating progress, all of which would be beneficial to learners who lack confidence when communicating using their L2.

The interactive strategies were also targeted as possible areas for self-improvement, for general communication practice, but also by two participants who were specifically looking for a corrective influence by native speakers. This specific SILL strategy item rated the lowest under *learning with others* which appears contradictory. However, in this EFL context the opportunity to interact with native speakers out of class is minimal, a learning context that might explain the contradiction.

5.3.3 Focus Group 1 – Question 3

If motivation to learn suddenly increased, what SILL strategies might be useful?

Confronted with the possibility of an event that would require swift L2 improvement, the focus once again turned to memory strategies, with three of the participants identifying improved vocabulary as a specific goal for learners at this level. One other noted a structured approach to reviewing learning as a useful strategy for test preparation. This strategy is mentioned on the SILL strategy classification explanation sheet, but is not really identified in the SILL questionnaire items as such. Again, it appears possible that the item choices for memory strategies might have negatively affected their usage scores across the group.

The other comments regarding a situation which might increase motivation to learn revolved around organising, which is likely a logical response by students such as these who are used to altering study habits for tests and examinations. One participant comments that metacognitive planning strategies might assist with remembering vocabulary – another focus on memory strategies that might again point toward limited SILL item choices under the *remembering* classification which could explain its low overall rating.

5.3.4 Focus Group 2

Table 5.16 Focus Group 2 analysis – Questions 1 - 3

Strategy Category	Explanation / Example
Remembering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1,2) INCREASED MOTIVATION WILL INCREASE ALL STRATEGY USAGE x 2
Mental processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (7) To assist with increasing vocabulary which increases ability to communicate • (3) Using all possible materials to increase learning opportunities • (7) Sorting new vocabulary – patterns etc and talk with others to reinforce
Compensating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (2) Don't need to understand every word for overall meaning • (1) Use any method to assist listeners to understand message
Organising and evaluating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (6) Creating a study plan – teachers do that for students and maybe best for students to create their own as well • (6) Seen as most effective to improve learning • (4) Evaluating past learning to improve current learning • (3) Evaluating past learning sets challenges and goals for improvement
Managing feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (7) To cope with stress that prevents communication
Learning with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (6) Makes learning L2 more interesting and helps with remembering words • (4) A good addition to other learning methods • (3) Helps to be corrected • (2) Going abroad – immersion increases all strategy use through necessity • (1) Better to study abroad even if foreign teacher present at home • (4) Improve accent and confidence • (7) Talk with others to reinforce cognitive strategies

- Question 1: Which strategies are currently used the most and thought most important?
- Question 2: Which strategies might help to become better learners?
- Question 3: If motivation to learn increased, which strategies would be useful?
- (Numbers) represent individual participants

5.3.5 Focus Group 2 – Question 1

The second focus group concentrated mainly on compensation and interactive social strategies when discussing their current strategy use. As with the participants in Group 1, it became evident that compensating strategies could assist the listener to grasp the intended meaning of the speaker. This appears to relate compensation to a tolerance for ambiguity:

P2 – “Using compensating for missing knowledge the most because I think that we don't really have to understand every word, just have to get the overall meaning...”

Furthermore, in this international environment in which English is a common means of communication among these L2 learners, compensation strategies are swiftly recognised as plausible aids toward communicating meaning, which points towards a tolerance for ambiguity being interactive in nature:

P1 – “I think is compensating, like normally even some foreigner they still don’t know all the word ... you know so many words, but the one that you’re talking to maybe he or she would like really not know what you are talking about. You still have to like ... others ... (pause) ... **Interviewer** – “Other ways to get your meaning across?” ... **P1** – “Mmm.” (as an assent).

Learning with others is also identified as a useful set of strategies for a variety of reasons. One participant sees interactive learning as a more relevant and interesting way of helping to remember vocabulary – once again illustrating that memory strategies might be seen as more important than the SILL figures show, and that the participants view strategies under other classifications actually as aids towards remembering.

5.3.6 Focus group 2 – Question 2

When asked which strategies were in the SILL that might be deemed useful, the participants were most interested in the cognitive strategies - the mental processes that assist the learning process – along with organising and learning with others. Yet again, remembering is deemed as important, although it is mentioned by the participant under the cognitive strategies, possibly because the SILL items are not specific or broad enough to allow explanation under the memory classification. The SILL strategy classification explanation sheet (Appendix I) to which the participants referred during the focus groups and interviews, includes items under the cognitive classification such as *repeating, practising with sounds, using formulas and patterns, and recombining familiar items in new ways*. These could very well be understood and used as memory strategies. Here a participant explains:

P7 – “...using mental processes were the most effective strategy that I could use because the only way that we could improve our English is to remember words as much as we can because if we can remember words then you could explain things better in English and try to use those new words in our English.”

P3's comments, however, regarding using all possible materials to increase learning opportunities, do correlate strongly with the SILL items for cognitive strategy use.

Learning with others is strongly represented as a strategy classification that would hold possibilities for future improvement, although here it appears that this would preferably be accomplished by learning abroad in an L2 immersion environment if possible, or in an environment such as this international school where there are learners from many countries. Going abroad to study the L2 was viewed by one participant as a learning strategy in itself and he commented that this principle of immersion might be seen as such but was not in the questionnaire. Although, in principle, *learning with others* would supposedly be the classification under which such an activity would take place, the participant has a valid point in that, for him at least, immersion learning is not specifically catered for within the item choices particularly well, or at least identified as such.

5.3.7 Focus Group 2 – Question 3

When faced with a context that would require increased motivation two of the participants were of the opinion that if this were the case, then the most likely scenario would be a reassessment of all strategy usage, with likely improvements, or increased usage, in all classifications. This was actually personally expected to be a more common comment with both focus groups, but in reality the participants were very focused on their comments and keen to voice opinions that would affect themselves on an individual basis.

P7 reaffirmed his comment from the previous question by attaching importance to cognitive methods of sorting new vocabulary and reinforcing it by talking with others. Apart from this comment there was a strong leaning towards the metacognitive role of organisational and evaluative strategies to assist with more urgent learning. As with comments made by Group 1, being organised was seen as a path to more effective learning. Furthermore, participants were inclined to see value in strategies for self-evaluation. Not only was this viewed as a way to identify areas for improvement, but also as a way to set goals, which is a specific item in the SILL under metacognitive strategies:

P3 – “...because that goals, it is very important they [L2 learners] have that, have to challenge that, try our best, it's how we can maybe learn more, increase a lot our learning.”

The SILL results show that these strategy items for self-evaluation and goal-setting both scored a low 2.33 overall. However, as with Group 1, when discussing strategies that might improve their current learning and L2 use in a general or immediate way, these metacognitive strategies gained the interest of this group. This would appear to be an excellent indicator for future teaching direction with this group of participants – clear learning outcomes (goals), a focus on structured, effective learning, and relevant, real-world speaking practice to maintain interest – and suggests that the introduction and discussion of specific strategy use can be beneficial to L2 learners by encouraging them to look at their learning processes, and how they might be improved.

5.4 Interviews – Questions 1 – 3

Although the interviews did not provide a significant amount of added detail, they did at least cement the very individual opinions expressed in the focus groups.

Table 5.17 Interviews analysis – Questions 1 - 3

Participant	Remembering	Mental processes	Compensation	Organising	Managing feelings	Learning with others
P7	Used least	Practising with sounds			Used least	For pronunciation Active learning assists memory Practice
P4	Memorising through repetition	Practising and repeating				Compare with and learn from others Increase opportunities to use L2
P9	Improve vocabulary Effective remembering			Organise and evaluate to improve vocabulary Study schedule for effective learning		Speaking with native speakers
P6	Use all and any strategies to acquire a pass			Organise a plan for clear goal		Increases motivation through interest value
P1	Improve memory in general for vocab and learning techniques taught		Any technique to compensate for missing knowledge especially unknown vocabulary			Speaking with native speakers Most likely to motivate
P2	Motivation increased by moving abroad so all strategies affected		Use prior knowledge to understand new information			Move abroad for immersion

Black – Current strategies/most useful

Blue – Strategies that might help be a better learner

Red – Strategies possibly adopted if highly motivated

Comments regarding current strategy use once again revolved mainly around compensation and interactive strategies. P2 expanded on his original comment about guessing meaning when listening by discussing the use of prior knowledge. This could include anything from

the L1, to existing L2, to an awareness of context, in order to understand new information. The active processes involved with *learning with others* were also described as an effective memory aid, again placing this goal outside of the actual SILL memory strategy classification. Strategies that were considered as possibly useful for future learning featured memory strategies to improve vocabulary, and metacognitive *organising* strategies to evaluate current knowledge and thereby improve vocabulary along with creating plans for goal-setting.

5.5 Focus groups and interview responses to Questions 4 – 6

These questions served a variety of purposes not directed specifically towards the participants' own strategy use, or possible strategy use, but more towards identifying the depth of participant understanding of the topic and obtaining a variety of opinions with regard to strategy use due to different context and circumstance.

Question 4: *Do you think people who have different reasons for learning to speak English might use different strategies?* A possible comparison was drawn between IELTS students and an L2 learner who wanted to emigrate to an English-speaking country.

Focus Group 1 found that students were more likely to require strategies that would help them with all four language skills, whereas immigrants were more likely to require strategies that would assist directly with conversation. Focus Group 2's responses concurred, and some participants indicated that *learning with others* was the most useful strategy classification for L2 learners who wished to improve their oral communication. One participant, however, noted that no matter the learning purpose, *remembering* is the most important.

P1 - "Everything that we do, we have to remember."

Furthermore, Group 2 noted the importance of vocabulary, and how specific it was to the learning purpose, identifying the difference between their own needs as students at an international school where all their subjects were taught in English, against those of a businessman who might need:

P6 - "more professional [and] more formal words...".

The area of vocabulary improvement in this study has previously been linked to *remembering* and *mental processes* and one participant (P7) noted this – that while the vocabulary learned might be different depending on the learning purpose, it all had to be memorised and practised. Another participant (P1) noted that the purpose of learning affected motivation which, in turn, affected strategy choice.

Question 5: *Do you think people from different countries might use different strategies?* A possible comparison was drawn between L2 learners from Asian countries with those from European countries (e.g. a Spanish student learning English).

Group 1 concentrated on Asian strategies with a main point being made that Chinese learners often focus on grammar, with high test scores being compared with poor speaking skills due to shyness. There was agreement that Asian learners from different countries have similar learning styles, but were not identical by any means. Group 2 also discussed the differences in what was learned rather than how it was learned. There was a general agreement that, due to similarities between European languages, such as the alphabet and grammatical structures, learning English would most likely be easier for Europeans (e.g. French or German) than it would for learners from Asian countries whose L1s are vastly different in terms of written forms and general structure. P6 thought that this would see European English learners focus more on remembering vocabulary, as opposed to the cognitive strategies involved with patterns of language.

Another participant noted differences in opportunity to practise:

P3 – “... in eastern culture especially for China their culture are different. People have little chance to speaking with others and so they learn grammar a lot, they are great grammar writing.”

P4 also noted in an interview that learners in Asian countries might have fewer opportunities to practise their L2, and that this might cause differences in strategy use, especially within the interactive and metacognitive classifications.

Question 6: *Do you think that males and females might use different learning strategies?*

This question engendered lively discussion during which a general agreement from both sides was predominant, in that females were more inclined to use organisational strategies than males. This, in fact, was not illustrated by the SILL, which showed nearly identical

organisational strategy use between the two genders. It does, however, correlate more strongly with findings from previous SILL studies, as was discussed earlier. The participants' perception of their own reality appears quite clear:

P1 – “girls are more organised than boys because boys are lazy.”

P7 – “...males are not really organised and females are organised. Just like when females are studying, if their things, like for example their notebooks are not organised, they'll just freak out, and even females have to take notes, they have to like read the things over and over again, but actually like for boys they'll just remember it in their mind, like they don't practise, because they are lazy.”

P4 – “the scientist said that for the males and females they have the different memorising systems and males they remember something that you imagine to be a picture or something ... but for females their memorising system is much more good at just read it many times so can remember it.”

P9 – “... I heard that the female's brain, brain structure is better to learn languages...”

“When I like see my friends, there's more chance to the female friends have better accent and maybe they're like better speakers.”

P6 – “...the female's brain structure is absolutely different, so it is a fact that the scientist reports that the female is more likely it's better on the language stuff and the male is better at the logical stuff...”

“The boys definitely would not use organising. They're just lazy and they can't take it. Well boys maybe they will just use compensation and learning with others more than girls.”

P2 – “[Girls are better at] ... organising and evaluating their learning.”

P1 – “...if the boys keep study like the girls they will be the same, but now the boy just keep lazy and even homework still don't care, so you know right? ... I think females used to organising, but for the boy just learning with others. If like if your friend not learn, so no one will learn it.”

The participants show excellent understanding of the concepts and classifications of learning strategies, and had very clear, specific and individual opinions about how they, and others, went about their learning. The comments above regarding male and female learning processes also showed some preconceptions that had been formed through experience and education. These learner beliefs, which have to do with how learners believe they learn, and how they think they should be taught, could possibly affect strategy choices and is a possible area for future research.

5.6 Observation counts for strategy use when speaking

A final collection of data was a count of observable strategies used by the participants when speaking in either a group context, or one on one with the researcher. The overall count, from the focus groups, interviews and informal practice speaking tests are shown below:

Table 5.18 Overall observation counts for focus groups, interviews and speaking tests

	Totals
Compensation strategies	
Switching to the L1	
Getting help	
Using mime or gesture	
Avoiding communication	37
Selecting the topic	2
Adjust or approximate the message	67
Coining words	1
Circumlocution or synonym	39
Metacognitive strategies	
Delay production to listen	4
Affective strategies	
Lower anxiety with laughter	8
Self encouragement by taking risks wisely	2
Social strategies	
Cooperate with peers	used extensively in focus groups
Cooperate with native user	1

Observed throughout both focus groups, but not realistically possible to count, was an ongoing cooperation with peers as the participants interacted well together, a strategy within the interactive classification of *learning with others*. Also observed was that this cooperation

increased spoken participation which indicated that such interactive strategies might assist with increasing confidence to communicate using the L2.

There was also a significantly high use of compensation strategies being used by the participants to help them successfully communicate their messages. Three in particular stood out as the most commonly used: avoiding communication (usually by merely skipping past unknown vocabulary), the use of circumlocution (the use of many words to describe something simple) and/or synonyms to replace unknown vocabulary, and approximating the message (by attempting to get near enough that the overall meaning was understood by the listener, and then moving on), being the most commonly used.

Two factors that might influence the popular usage of these strategies are the attitude of the listener, and the context of the spoken interaction. These two factors can combine, as they did with this study, to form an interactive environment in which the speakers were relaxed, and the listeners were encouraging and non-corrective. Here the main goal excluded the need for grammatical correctness, although not necessarily the desire for such. The main goal of these interactions was to communicate meaning quickly and efficiently, using the language and strategies that were available not only to the speakers, but to the listeners also. As communication is always interactive, it could be assumed that understanding what is being said as the goal of the listener is as important in the communication process as the successful conveyance of meaning to the listener. It then follows that being both encouraging and non-corrective are actually listening strategies that assist with communication and, as such, could deserve inclusion as strategy items within strategy use assessment surveys, further recognising their importance in the communication and learning processes.

Chapter Six - Conclusions

6.1 The assessment of current language learning strategy usage

Research Question One: What are the learners' current language learning strategy profiles?

The first goal of this study was to assess the current language learning strategies being used by the sample group of participants, who were fairly homogenous in terms of age, learning history, learning goals, and learning context. This assessment was designed to determine not only what learning strategies were being used, and how often, but when they were being used and why. The conclusions are drawn separately below, from quantitative analysis obtained from the SILL measurements, and the event sampling from the structured observations, and qualitative analysis from the focus groups and interviews.

6.1.1 Quantitative conclusions regarding current strategy usage

With regard to all language learning strategy classifications, compensation strategies, the highest rating classification, are directly involved with communication, especially spoken communication. These initial results might therefore indicate this goal as an overall learning focus among the participants. The importance placed on communication, and the compensatory strategies that aid effective communication, was supported strongly by the event sampling results which showed very high levels of compensation being used, and these appear to relate to a tolerance for ambiguity in terms of both delivering and receiving messages. Easily the most commonly used methods of compensation were partial avoidance of communication, message approximation and the use of circumlocution or synonyms. It was then reasoned that the effectiveness of compensatory strategies such as these can be improved by the acceptance and encouragement of the listener. Learning with others, being an interactive, social strategy classification would logically align with this communicative focus and, indeed, rated strongly among these participants. It could then be concluded that the participants appreciated the two-way nature of spoken interaction – perhaps speaking *with* someone, rather than *at* them. However, whether the participants wanted this interaction to be

corrective in nature was questionable, and applying interactive strategies for corrective purposes actually rated the lowest of the items included under compensatory strategies.

Being high school students, with learning purposes involving future tests and examinations, the cognitive and metacognitive classifications that involve mental processing, planning and organisation, also figure strongly in these overall results. These strategy groups appear to relate directly to specific learning purposes for these participants.

Managing feelings did not appear to be held as particularly important, although due to a known lack of confidence with some participants, especially when speaking, this area looked to be of further interest as to why, as an overall classification, it was rated so low. An examination of the overall results showed that while certain affective strategies were indeed rated very low, not all were (see Table 5.10). From the SILL's six available strategies, three were rated low and looked to be less meaningful for these particular participants. This could be due to a number of factors such as personality traits, individual learning styles, learner beliefs, historical learning experience, or current teaching practices – factors which are known to affect strategy use among individuals. The remaining three affective strategies, on the other hand, rated quite high and appeared to suit these participants who were keen to communicate, but not always confident in their ability to do so. This seems to suggest that the ratings for these individual SILL items, and their perceived relevance, might depend on certain variable factors. These might include the affective activities the participants are accustomed to, how they currently approach their learning due to personal preference, or how they have been taught, and/or what they are trying to achieve.

Similarly, the overall ratings for memory strategies were relatively low, which did correlate with suggestions, and personal belief, that the perception of Asian learners' reliance on rote learning is both outdated and stereotypical. However, it also conflicted with an importance often placed by learners at this level, with such focused learning goals, on the acquisition and retention of new vocabulary and its correct, contextual usage. As with the memory strategies, analysing the overall SILL results for this classification showed that four of the nine available items rated quite highly, while the other five were rated low (see Table 5.11). Those items that received lower ratings did not appear relevant in terms of these participants' proficiency levels, or current learning practices. This suggests that overall memory strategy usage results might also be negatively affected by individual items available on the SILL, again possibly

due to widely variable affective factors which are peculiar to individual learners, or even to groups of learners who are relatively homogenous. It could then be concluded that the relevance of SILL items might be determined by the participants, and that overall classification results could be determined contextually by the learning goals, L2 levels, and current learning methodologies of the participants.

Analysis of the SILL results by participant, by individual item and SD results, also revealed the very individual approaches to strategy usage among the participants. This could be perceived in either of two ways (see Tables 5.7 and 5.8). Firstly, while two participants might show an equal, or very similar, overall result for a strategy classification, the individual items within that classification frequently show quite different ratings. Therefore, the participants frequently took differing, and very individual, strategic paths to reach their learning destination. Otherwise, participants sometimes showed significantly different overall results for certain strategy classifications, and it seems appropriate to conclude that these variations are proportionate to the variety of learning methodologies within the group of participants, and to the factors that help to create these individual approaches to language acquisition.

A final conclusion with regard to the overall SILL results is that there was not enough evidence to support any specific correlation found between strategy usage and successful, or unsuccessful, language acquisition or performance. In fact, there was more evidence to show lower strategy usage among the higher achievers within the group which, although far from conclusive, might suggest that the conscious adoption of learning strategies could actually decrease as acquisition and proficiency increases. Alternatively, or in conjunction, this evidence might suggest that the strategies chosen for the SILL might become less relevant to L2 learners as their language proficiency increases.

6.1.2 Qualitative conclusions regarding current strategy usage

Discussion with both focus groups, and interviewees, regarding current strategy usage, concentrated mainly on the classifications of compensation, learning with others and, in contradiction to its low SILL overall rating, the importance of memorisation. Outstanding among these discussions was not only what strategies were deemed important, but why.

Conclusions drawn above with regard to the contextual relevance of individual SILL items, and how they can affect the rating for the overall classification, appear to be supported by

certain participant opinion. For example, the relevance of memorisation strategies was not in question, only that there could be specific requirements such as vocabulary acquisition and its correct and appropriate usage. This goal correlates with the high-rating SILL memorisation items that deal with context and concepts of appropriateness. Another participant saw learning with others as a more interesting way to remember vocabulary, again placing more importance on remembering than the SILL figures show, but the purpose for the strategy appearing under a separate classification, for an individual reason. It could be concluded that not only do the SILL figures not truly represent the importance of memory strategies for these participants, but that individual items for other classifications might contain individual meaning and purpose for participants. In some cases, participants showed an ability to ‘invent’ their own purposes for strategy classifications, for example, using learning with others as a comparative method of setting individual learning goals. This is certainly a viable learning strategy, but not listed as an individual SILL item, which again appears to support a conclusion that the relevance of SILL items can be determined by a participant’s learning context and goals and, therefore, that SILL results could be context specific.

6.2 The assessment of the viability and usefulness of increasing strategy awareness

A second priority of this study was to add to the body of knowledge with regard to the concept of strategy training. This entails a conscious decision to introduce the concept of specific learning strategies to language learners with the goal of improving language acquisition and creating more successful, more autonomous learners. Conclusions were drawn with regard to the viability and usefulness through participant responses to the second and third research questions. These were delivered during the focus groups and interviews:

Research Question Two: Are there any learning strategies that have been presented to the learners that they see as possibly being useful additions to their individual learning processes? This question was presented to the participants in the focus groups and interviews in the following form: Were there strategies in the SILL that might help you to become a better learner?

Research Question Three: If presented with a learning context that would demand increased motivation, would the learners contemplate altering their strategy usage? This

question was presented to the participants in the focus groups and interviews in the following form: Do you think increased motivation might change the strategies that you use?

By asking these questions, after already having introduced and discussed learning strategies at length, it was intended that the participants find for themselves, through their responses, useful opportunities to improve their learning. A complementary intent was to identify whether the strategy introduction would create opportunities to increase teaching focus by clarifying learner goals.

6.2.1 Useful SILL strategies

A simple initial conclusion was to be drawn with regard to the usefulness of increasing strategy awareness based on the number and variety of responses as to whether the participants identified useful learning opportunities in the SILL. These responses could be affected by factors of participant interest, engagement and, especially, honesty, as identifying areas for improvement could possibly be negatively perceived by the participants as admitting weaknesses. The participants' responses, however, showed interest, variety and inventiveness which identified areas for both self-improvement, as well as intimations pertaining to how they wished to be taught. These responses, at the very least, are useful to both learner and teacher with regard to the validity of increasing strategy awareness.

Memory strategies were viewed as having merit, but in the specific area of vocabulary and appropriate usage. Also, participants saw strategies that might aid memory under separate strategy classifications. For example, guessing meaning, a compensatory strategy, was viewed as a possibly effective method of remembering and using new vocabulary. Similarly, memory strategies were recognised under the cognitive classification, using strategies such as repeating and practising.

Metacognitive strategies were targeted as possible areas for improvement. Significantly, the individuality of strategy usage purpose was highlighted by a participant who saw merit with improved study scheduling, as opposed to a participant who might turn to improving his organisation to make up for a perceived weakness participating with others in an interactive manner.

Finally, learning with others was again a popular area for discussion. Two participants focused on its possible corrective nature, which contradicted this particular use as the lowest rated SILL item in this classification. As a corrective influence would most likely come from a teacher or other fluent speaker outside of class, it could be concluded that this low rating is due to the participants' EFL learning environment, which minimises contact with fluent L2 speakers apart from their teacher. An additional conclusion might be that the desire for correction in this context is entirely individual in nature. Another participant concentrated on learning with others as being most effectively carried out abroad, in an immersion environment, which recognised a perceived limitation in the current learning environment, a desire for self-improvement, and that participant's personal opinion with regard to a perceived shortage in available SILL items under this classification.

In terms of the debate as to whether communicative strategies should be considered as language learning, or language *use* strategies, perhaps the conclusion depends on the intent of those who are communicating – that intent being whether or not they are trying to learn. The participants taking part in this study rated both SILL communicative strategy classifications of compensation and learning with others highly, and discussed them energetically. Not only was there significant agreement in the value of these strategies as learning tools, but participants had very clear, specific and individual ideas about they could benefit by using them.

6.2.2 Increasing motivation

There was a certain expectation, on my own behalf, that a logical response to a scenario that would increase a learner's motivation to improve would be that of focusing on all available strategies, improving or increasing their usage. This response was voiced, but more common were responses that identified individual attitudes toward self-improvement, or specific strategy usage toward a specific learning goal.

Participant responses, for example, referred especially to metacognitive strategies that involve organisation, goal-setting and self-evaluation. A conclusion could be drawn here, that these would be suitable responses from learners who worked in a learning context that included regular testing and examination, realistic contexts for the requirement of rapid improvement. However, these responses are in contradiction to the SILL results for self-

evaluation and goal-setting under the metacognitive classification. It was instead, through the discussion of the motivational scenario, combined with an awareness of available strategies, that the participants appeared to become conscious of the learning opportunities available to them, and the contexts in which they could prove most useful.

From this it appears possible that the introduction of specific learning strategies, matched to particular and relevant learning scenarios, can provide useful learning pathways, learning opportunities, and even inspiration to language learners by encouraging them to focus on the strengths and weaknesses of their learning processes. Most importantly, perhaps, is that these opportunities can be created, or invented, by the learners themselves, for themselves, which might then see the process of increasing strategy awareness as a useful and relevant learning experience. Furthermore, from a teacher's standpoint, the actual discussion with the participant/learners, can reveal specific learning goals, which can then act as indicators for future teaching direction. In this way, it could be concluded that increasing strategy awareness assists the teacher by increasing the learners' abilities to discuss their learning needs and goals.

6.3 Recommendations for future research

Through the undertaking of this study, including the attainment of certain data that was not specifically relevant to the three main research questions, certain issues were raised and promising, but inconclusive, data gathered. It is hoped that the following discussions will provide encouragement and direction for future researchers.

6.3.1 Issues with the SILL

The SILL is still the most widely used learning strategy assessment tool today and has many advantages, foremost of which are its effective usability due to its size and simplicity, and its recognised levels of validity and reliability. Also, the SILL's worksheet and profile sheets allow the participants to create their own strategy profiles, which help make the entire process both interesting and inclusive.

The SILL is not without disadvantage, however, as has been pointed out in the literature, and in the conclusions drawn above. The main issue found with this study in particular was

determining that the SILL results were specific to this group of participants. This presents two separate issues. Firstly, the results from the SILL for each classification appear to be determined, at least in part, by the predetermined selection of strategies which the participants were asked to rate. Strategies that were relevant to these participants were rated accordingly high, whereas those that were not relevant were rated lower. In other words, the selection of the SILL items might have had as much to do with the overall results as the actual importance placed by the participants on a specific classification. This seemed especially noticeable with the memory strategies, which rated quite low, and contradicted the importance placed on them by the participants which became apparent in the focus groups. Should other strategies have been selected for the SILL, more relevant to the participants' learning experience, then the result might have been altered significantly. The second issue becomes one of comparability with other similar studies which looks to be hampered by the contextual specificity of individual SILL results.

In saying that, however, it is also understood that the SILL is designed to be used in a variety of learning situations, and with a variety of participants of varying nationalities and levels of acquisition. What strategies are relevant to one sample of participants might not be relevant to another. It must also be assumed that if this were the case, then all of the classifications might be equally affected, possibly negatively or positively. Perhaps then, comparability might not be the main goal with similar future studies, but rather to amass a body of knowledge with regard to strategy usage in as many specific contexts as possible, from which an overall picture might be obtained.

Another issue with the SILL results was again identified through the focus groups and interviews when it became increasingly noticeable that memory strategies were viewed as more important by the participants than was gauged from the SILL results. Through these discussions participants frequently identified the usefulness of memory strategies, but aligned with other strategy classifications such as cognitive, metacognitive and learning with others. The opinions of the participants were usually entirely valid and indeed, these classifications do appear to contain strategies, or at least the possibility of strategies (e.g. engaging with other L2 speakers as an interesting method of retaining vocabulary was one suggestion) that would viably be placed within the memory classification. This is, perhaps, less an issue with the SILL itself, and more a symptom of the ongoing debate about what strategies are available to learners, and how they should be classified, which appears to be an ongoing area

for future research. A conclusion drawn here, however, is that any research into this area might not be complete without input from learners as even this small study has shown learners' inventiveness, creativity and understanding of their own learning processes – what works for them, what might work for them, and why.

6.3.2 The Spearman Rho correlation findings

The Spearman Rho correlations which eventuated from the overall strategy usage t-test found some strong correlations between certain strategy classification pairings – remembering with cognitive and metacognitive classifications, and affective with cognitive and social classifications. Such correlations suggest that participants who return high usage results for one classification of the pair, will return high ratings for the other, and vice versa. An example was made with some participants who might not be concerned with managing stress and anxiety (affective strategies), might also not be concerned with engaging in the interactive strategies involved with learning with others or, again, vice versa. These findings, a partial result of the initial assessment of the participants' current strategy usage, appear significant enough to recommend as areas for future research, presenting possible information with regard to teaching methodologies, lesson planning and design.

6.3.3 Strategy usage by gender and ethnicity

Certain secondary findings were made during the course of this study that appeared significant enough to include, but due to the small sample size were not possible to prove conclusive. These findings include those for strategy usage by gender and ethnicity.

Past studies have shown significant differences in strategy usage between male and female learners. The SILL results for this study, however, showed overall usage results that were remarkably similar. To add further interest to this finding were the later comments from the participants who appeared in no doubt as to the significance of the difference between the genders in the way they approach their learning. Strong as those opinions might be, there appeared to be an element of learner belief in the comments, a possible result of previous experience, that might be at odds with reality.

These contradictory findings could provide an area for future research, adding to the body of knowledge with regard to strategy use by gender, perhaps attempting to determine whether gender differences are real, or perceived. Specifically, comparative SILL studies between similar participant samples, in terms of age and learning context, could gauge the likelihood of these gender results as being specific to the traits of this participant sample. Alternatively, future studies might help to determine the effect of historical learning experience, locality and learning context on strategy use by gender.

The SILL results by ethnicity also drew some significant findings. Although the participant sample for this study was entirely Asian, it was made up from three nationalities, or ethnic groups – Thai, Chinese and Korean. While the Chinese and Korean strategy usage results were very similar, by both individual classification result, and by overall usage, the Thai participants showed significantly lower usage results in every classification except compensation, in which they showed near identical usage to the other participants. The other classifications returned usage results that could be described as remarkably low in comparison. As with gender strategy usage, comparative studies among various Asian ethnic groups might help to establish the effect of factors such as historical learning experience, locality and learning context. Studies such as these could offer insights that might significantly impact on future teaching strategies and methodologies.

6.4 Strategy usage vs. proficiency

In this particular study, the low strategy usage did not correlate with lower levels of successful acquisition or proficiency, in fact quite the opposite was indicated. This suggests possible areas for future research as including comparative strategy usage studies by level of current participant proficiency – what strategy types are used, and what levels of strategy usage are displayed, as language proficiency levels increase. A further recommendation would be to suggest participant involvement in order to assess the purpose of the individual strategy usage and its relation to both language level and learning goals.

6.5 Limitations of the study

There are a number of limitations of this study that could be considered as relevant. Although all possible steps were taken to minimise these limitations, possibilities might remain with regard to their affecting the outcomes of the study:

1. The study was completed by small sample groups. This will impact most on the quantitative portions of the data collection, where greater statistical significance would most likely be gained from larger samples.
2. A more equal ratio of male to female participants would have been preferable.
3. Although all care was taken with regard to the issue of teacher/researcher authority and power issues, there remains a possibility that the context might bias or otherwise affect participant responses.
4. Participant responses could be determined, in part, by their attitude towards the exercise and by their willingness to be honest with their responses.
5. The SILL was left in its English format and the focus groups and interviews were conducted without the benefit of a translator. There remains a possibility that meaning could have been lost or misunderstood within these contexts.
6. There remains a possibility of my own subjectivity with regard to my interpretations of participant responses in the focus groups and interviews.
7. The observations undertaken for this study were somewhat limited with regard to their scope which affects both reliability and validity. More long-term observations would have been preferable, over the course of the semester for example, but personally carrying these out would have negatively affected my primary role as the participants' teacher.

6.6 Implications for this study

Certain implications for this study rest with any perceived value that might be attached to the conclusions above, which are summarised below:

- That communication strategies, both compensatory and interactive, were generally viewed as valuable learning opportunities, rather than usage, with individual, varied and specific learning goals as desired outcomes.
- That a tolerance for ambiguity appears to help with successful communication, and that this is a two-way characteristic affecting both sender and receiver.
- That the SILL strategy items might be contextually relevant to specific participant samples.
- That there is a significantly individual approach shown with regard to current personal strategy usage, both by individual strategy use and by strategy classification.
- That there was a very individual nature with regard to learning opportunities presented in the form of added, or improved, strategy use.
- That strategy usage might relate directly to the specific learning purpose and context.
- That correlations might exist, specific to individual learners, between certain strategy classification pairings.
- That participants identified specific strategy purposes under separate strategy classifications (e.g. for remembering within cognitive and social classifications).
- That strategy usage among this participant sample, does not always appear to positively correlate with language acquisition and proficiency levels.
- That SILL items might vary in relevance and usefulness according to participant L2 levels of proficiency.
- That open discussion pertaining to current and future strategy use appeared to encourage increased consciousness of possible learning opportunities.
- That open discussion pertaining to current and future strategy use identified learner needs and goals.

The main implication indicated by these summarised conclusions appears to relate to the pure individuality of the process of learning a foreign language. The literature discusses a broad range of factors that affect the learning process, from character traits to the effect of the

learning environment, so perhaps this is to be expected. But from such a small and fairly homogenous participant sample, the individuality shown was so pervasive, and touched on so many aspects of language learning, that it appears worthy of specific mention and future consideration. The implication here seems to be that in order for teachers to successfully facilitate their learners' successful language acquisition, they would do well to be as conversant as possible with the individual natures and learning goals of their learners. In so doing, teachers can then plan lessons with specific goal-oriented learning outcomes that are relevant to their learners in terms of content, usefulness and level.

To this end, it was decided that the implications of this study lie not only in the findings and their resulting conclusions and recommendations, but in the methodology of the research itself – the intent of the research, and way in which the research was conducted in order to benefit the participants, as language learners, and the researcher, as a language teacher. These implications are discussed below.

6.6.1 The mixed-methods and teacher/researcher approaches

With this study at least, the research methods were determined by the main goals of the research. In this case, those goals combine to form an overall intent of assessing learning strategy usage and improving strategy awareness in such a way as to improve the learners' L2 acquisition, retention and production. As a teacher, the key words here are *assess*, and *awareness*. The assessment was always to be more than a count of what strategies were used, and when they might be used, but also why they might be used. To determine this, to any useful degree, the opinions of the learners were required. As a teacher/researcher, increasing learner awareness of language learning strategies could be seen as much as a teaching methodology as it is actual research – a methodology specifically designed to help the learners to become more successful language learners, while at the same time attempting to add to the body of knowledge with regard to language learning.

In order to even come close to achieving this goal, and through completion of this research process, it has been concluded that the mixed-methods approach was more than merely useful, it was essential. Notwithstanding the issues discussed above, the SILL proved to be an excellent research tool – it was easy and interesting for the learners to use, was a valuable tool with which to introduce the learners to the concepts of language learning strategies and,

issues of detail aside, appears to have presented an accurate and overall picture of strategy use by participant group and individual, and by gender and ethnicity. It is considered, however, that only the opinions of the participants were able to add true meaning to the statistics that had been obtained. Furthermore, through discussion, the participant/learners were empowered, involved, and encouraged to focus on their learning processes. It is perhaps this very fact that indicates a major implication for this study, which is that the conscious introduction of language learning strategies to these learners encouraged them to look at the way they go about their learning, and offered a medium by which they could deduce future learning opportunities that might suit their specific learning styles and goals. Where the SILL identified individual approaches to strategy use, the focus groups and interviews added meaning and purpose for those approaches.

As a teacher/researcher the benefits of the mixed-methods approach have been two-fold. As a researcher the qualitative aspects of the research process appear to have added valuable and useful depth to quantitatively acquired data. As a teacher, the quantitative SILL and event sampling offered insight into learning strategy usage which identified areas that might be exploited, and those that might be improved. On the other hand, the discussions added insight into historical learning experiences and personal learning goals, both of which were valuable when planning lesson content and methods of delivery. It could be concluded then, that a further implication for this study was that my role as both teacher and researcher might have been beneficial to my role as teacher which, therefore, might benefit my current and future students.

However, there is no denying that issues of possible bias and authority exist in these scenarios, and concerns with regard to these issues require serious consideration. Yet inherent dangers might also fairly be claimed to exist with other educational research methodologies. For example, learners, or teachers, might be unnerved or unsettled when being interviewed or observed by strangers. Or, it could be considered that interruptive intervention studies using control groups might disadvantage entire groups of participants while benefiting others. The final conclusion of this study then, and a possible implication for future studies, comes as more of a personal understanding about the nature of educational research and research ethics, and the value of the enormous gift that came in the form of my learners' participation, openness, honesty, humour and patience. Perhaps safety with educational research lies not in

the type of methodology, but in the intent of the research and the focus on, and regard for, those who should most stand to benefit from that research – our learners.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Participant Information Sheet



Date Information Sheet Produced:

3 December 2009

Project Title

Language learning strategy usage towards the production of spoken English.

Research question:

What is the effect of increasing learner awareness of language learning strategies towards the production of spoken English in the context of a Chinese international school's IELTS training course?

An Invitation

My name is Alan Boyce and I will be your IELTS trainer/teacher for the new semester. During our time together, and through the normal course of my teaching and your learning, I wish to invite you to participate in a research programme I am undertaking for my thesis completion – Master of Education, with AUT University in Auckland, New Zealand. I have been a teacher of English as a second/foreign language, specialising in IELTS training, for many years (including three years in China), and was Academic Manager for the company that owns CIS for the past two years, organising curricula and materials, and training teachers. I left this position at the end of last year to complete my studies full-time.

The purpose of the research is explained below, and any further questions you might have at any stage – before, during, or after the research has taken place – will be answered completely, to your satisfaction.

- Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and you would be free to withdraw any time without any adverse consequences.
- The research, and your participation, would have no consequences towards your graduation at this school, will not adversely affect your study in any way, and would have no effect on any activities or classes outside of this IELTS training. Whether you choose to participate or not will not advantage, or disadvantage, your standing in the class, or your studies, in any way.
- Your participation would be greatly appreciated, but if you feel for any reason, at any time, that it is not for you, then I thank you for your consideration.
- Should you agree to participate, your privacy and confidentiality will be maintained permanently.

What is the purpose of this research?

The proposed research would be done in order for thesis completion required for the Master of Education degree at AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand. The data collected will be stored for up to six years and might be used, by me alone, in possible doctoral studies.

The purpose of the research is to add to the body of knowledge about how learning strategy training might help to create better, more successful learners of second, or foreign, languages.

Language learning strategies – the thoughts, behaviours and activities that you use in order to learn English – are important to both me, as a teacher, and you as learners. Learning more about how you use these strategies (for example – how you plan and organise, what things you do that help you learn and remember information, and how you interact with others in the class) helps us to understand more about how individuals actually learn.

It is hoped that learners, such as yourselves, will become more successful at acquiring second/foreign languages, and therefore more motivated to use the language, if we can work together to identify the learning strategies that you use. I would like to either improve how you use these strategies, or add new strategies that will combine to assist your learning and make you better, and more successful, at learning and using English.

Please feel free to ask me any questions – I will be happy to answer any queries you might have, at any time.

How was I chosen for this invitation?

This research, and research similar to this, is being done in schools and universities all over the world. Your class is particularly interesting as you are all undertaking IELTS training and you come from different countries, and it would be particularly interesting to see if people from different places like to learn in different ways.

What will happen in this research?

The research itself will not make any difference to our normal teaching/learning activities, and while it will focus mainly on “speaking” (mainly because the content must be narrowed down for the thesis), work will continue as usual with writing, listening and reading.

Should you decide not to participate in the focus group part of the research, your decision will be completely respected and will not reflect upon you in a negative way, nor disadvantage you, or your studies, in any way.

A. I will ask you to complete a questionnaire

Early in the semester I would like you to complete two questionnaires. The first will help me to understand why you are learning English, and which English skills you think are the most important. This questionnaire will only take a few minutes.

The second questionnaire will take about 45 minutes. It will identify for you, and for me, the strategies you use when you learn and study. Afterwards you will be able to create your own, personal learning strategy profile (which will remain private and confidential) that will help you to see areas

where you might improve your learning, and help me see areas where I could improve the content and type of our lessons.

Basically, we are counting the strategies you use, when you use them, and how often. *There are no wrong or right answers, or correct or incorrect ways of learning. The purpose is to help us all to do better, and to help others do better.*

B. We will have discussions in groups and as a whole class in order to identify what you think about “learning”. I would like to record the discussions to help me remember what was said.

As well as the questionnaires it is proposed that focus groups (say, 5-6 students at a time) will be held in which we can discuss openly issues with learning and studying, and what you think about strategies and strategy training. A similar discussion can be held with the entire class. Again, there are no wrong or right answers with these discussions. Your opinions about your learning and the ways you are taught are very valuable whatever they might be.

C. I would like to set aside some activities so I can listen to you speak and observe your use of gestures and other possible speaking strategies.

It is proposed that role plays (or a similar activity in which speaking is required for a reasonable amount of time) be observed by the researcher. First, near the beginning of the semester, to identify strategies you might use when speaking English (which is a normal part of the teaching process). Then again later in the semester to see if there is a difference in strategy use, along with possible improvements in speaking and/or confidence and motivation.

Open discussions would be held after these activities during which your opinions would be greatly valued. Again, there is no right or wrong way of completing these activities, and no chance for failure or embarrassment. We are here to learn.

What are the benefits?

To the researcher:

- Gain information regarding learning strategies in order to complete thesis
- Gain information that will greatly assist in becoming a better teacher, a better teacher trainer, and a better course director

In general:

- Add to the growing, worldwide body of knowledge regarding learning strategies and how they differ (or don't) around the world according to ethnic groups, age and gender. This knowledge should help learners and teachers all over the world to become better and more successful.

To you, the participants:

- At the very least you will learn more about the way you go about your learning, and hopefully identify areas that you might be able to focus on in order to improve
- By improving, hopefully you would become more confident and more motivated
- As you all learn in different ways, you might benefit by learning successful strategies from others

How will my privacy be protected?

No one will ever learn your real names, or the name of this school, in any future papers or publications

At no stage, before, during or after the research has been completed, and the thesis published, or in any future papers, conferences or seminars, will you, or CIS, be identified by your real names, nor will your opinions be identified with you personally, or delivered to any third parties attributed to you personally.

Should you decide not to participate I thank you for your consideration and I understand and respect your decision completely. Your decision is a private one, to made by you alone, and at no stage, before, during, or after the research has been completed, would you be identified in any way, or in fact, referred to at all during any stage of the research process. Again, this decision will not disadvantage your studies, or your standing in class, in any way whatsoever.

The students' individual responses to the invitation to participate in all aspects of the research procedures will be kept strictly confidential. Those students who do agree to participate in a focus group situation will be approached separately and the focus groups will be arranged to occur, not in class time, at a time and place convenient and appropriate for those students. The focus groups will be held separately and the students will only be aware of the members of their own focus group, the other focus group members' names, and thereby the names of non-participants, remaining confidential. Individual interviews undertaken with the informed consent of the student will be held out of class time, on an individual basis, so other class members will not be aware of the participation, or non-participation of other class members.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have two weeks to consider this invitation during which time I will answer any questions and make any further explanations required. You will have an opportunity to see the questionnaires and we can go over them together and in detail. I will also supply a list of question types for the focus groups so you will know what questions might be asked.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Should you agree to participate a consent form will be given to you to read and sign. Again, at this stage, you are free to ask any questions.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

The published thesis will be made public and I will supply internet details on how it can be accessed.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Associate Professor Nesta Devine or phone 0064 9 921 9999 ext. 7361

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 8044.

The researcher's supervisor at CIS is Felix Li lichuankui@hotmail.com or he can be contacted directly at his office, or you may contact the teacher who is inviting you to participate in this research.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Alan Boyce

aldiver2000@gmail.com

Also contactable directly at the school, during class, or in the teachers' room

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

***Associate Professor Nesta Devine, School of Education, Auckland University of Technology,
Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, New Zealand.***

nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz Tel: 64 9 921 9999 ext. 7361

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *11 November 2009* AUTEK Reference number *09/170*

Appendix B

Confidentiality Agreement



For an intermediary or research assistant.

Project title: *Language learning strategy usage towards the production of spoken English*

Project Supervisor: *Associate Professor Nesta Devine and Dr Lynn Grant*

Researcher: *Alan Boyce AUT Student No. 0958674*

- ☐ I understand that all the material I will be asked to record is confidential.
- ☐ I understand that the contents of the Consent Forms, tapes, or interview notes can only be discussed with the researchers.
- ☐ I will not keep any copies of the information nor allow third parties access to them.

Intermediary's signature:

Intermediary's name:

Intermediary's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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.....
.....
.....

Date:

Project Supervisor's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee 11 November, 2009,
AUTEK Reference number 09/170*

Appendix C

Consent Form



Project title: Language learning strategy usage towards the production of spoken English

Project Supervisor: Associate Professor Nesta Devine

Researcher: Alan Boyce

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 03 December 2009
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the focus group and that it will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the focus group discussion of which I was part, the relevant information about myself including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will not be used.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....
.....
.....
.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 11 November 2009
AUTEC Reference number 09/170

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix D

Consent Form



Project title: Language learning strategy usage towards the production of spoken English

Project Supervisor: Associate Professor Nesta Devine

Researcher: Alan Boyce

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 03 December 2009
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....
.....
.....
.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 11 November 2009
AUTEC Reference number 09/170

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix E



Background Questionnaire

1. How long have you been studying English? _____

2. As a rough guide, about how many hours per week? _____

3. Using the numbers 1. Very important

2. Important

3. Not important

let me know why you are learning English:

_____ interested in the language

_____ interested in the culture

_____ have friends who speak the language and want to communicate

_____ required to take English as part of my course

_____ need it for future study

_____ need it for future career

_____ need it for travel

_____ other _____

4. Do you enjoy language learning? Circle one (you don't have to answer this question!)

Yes

Not really

It's ok

Appendix F



Strategy Inventory For Language Learners (SILL)

Author: Professor Rebecca Oxford, Columbia University, New York.

This questionnaire is used all over the world. It is designed to give you (and us) information about the way you approach the tasks of learning a foreign language. It will give you information about your own learning techniques, once you have filled in all the questions and evaluate your answers.

Please answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what you think other people might do. **This is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers.** If you have any questions please feel free to ask them at any time.

How to complete this questionnaire:

Please read the statements below. They are all about learning English. Please write the number from the statement that seems closest to how you personally learn in the space provided.

At the end, time will be given to transfer your answers to the answer sheet provided. You will keep the question sheet and hand in the answer sheet which will not have your name on it.

We truly appreciate your taking the time to do this questionnaire and hopefully you will learn a great deal from it as the semester progresses. Thank you all!

Statements and their matching number. Which number is the most like you?

1. *Never true of me*: also includes 'almost never true of me'- it doesn't happen very often in your learning behaviour
2. *Usually not true of me*: it happens occasionally in your learning behaviour
3. *Somewhat true of me*: it happens in a fairly regular pattern in your learning behaviour
4. *Usually true of me*: it happens regularly and represents an obvious pattern in your learning behaviour

5. *Always true of me*: also includes 'almost always true of me'- it happens almost all the time and represents a strong pattern in your learning behaviour

SILL Questionnaire:

Part: A

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

Part: B

10. I say or write new English words several times. _____
11. I try to talk like native English speakers. _____
12. I practice the sounds of English. _____
13. I use the English word I know in different ways. _____
14. I start conversations in English. _____
15. I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English. _____
16. I read for pleasure in English. _____

17. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English. _____
18. I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully. _____
19. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English. _____
20. I try to find patterns in English. _____
21. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand. _____
22. I try not to translate word-for-word. _____
23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English. _____

Part: C

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

Part: D

30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English. _____
31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better. _____
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English. _____
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English. _____
34. I plan my schedule so I have enough time to study English. _____
35. I look for people I can talk to in English. _____
36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English. _____

37. I have clear goals for improving my English skills. _____
38. I think about my progress in learning English. _____

Part: E

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

Part: F

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

Appendix G

Strategy Inventory for Language Learners (SILL) - Answer Sheet

- The blanks (_____) are numbered for each item on the SILL
- Write your response (1,2,3,4 or 5) to each item in the blank
- Add up each column
- Divide each total by the number shown and round to the nearest tenth, as in $3.4 = 3.0$
- Obtain overall average by adding the five totals and dividing by 50

Part A	Part B	Part C	Part D	Part E	Part F	Sum
1.	10.	24.	30.	39.	45.	A.
2.	11.	25.	31.	40.	46.	B.
3.	12.	26.	32.	41.	47.	C.
4.	13.	27.	33.	42.	48.	D.
5.	14.	28.	34.	43.	49.	E.
6.	15.	29.	35.	44.	50.	F.
7.	16.		36.			
8.	17.		37.			
9.	18.		38.			
	19.					
	20.					
	21.					
	22.					
	23.					
Sum:	Sum:	Sum:	Sum:	Sum:	Sum:	Sum:
÷ 9=	÷ 14=	÷ 6=	÷ 9=	÷ 6=	÷ 6=	÷ 50=

Profile:

This profile shows what learning strategies you use when learning English. There are no right or wrong answers! To complete your profile please transfer your averages from the answer chart above.

Part:	What strategies are covered:	Your average:
A.	Remembering more effectively	
B.	Using all your mental processes	
C.	Compensating for missing knowledge	
D.	Organising and evaluating your learning	
E.	Managing your feelings	
F.	Learning with others	
	Overall average	=

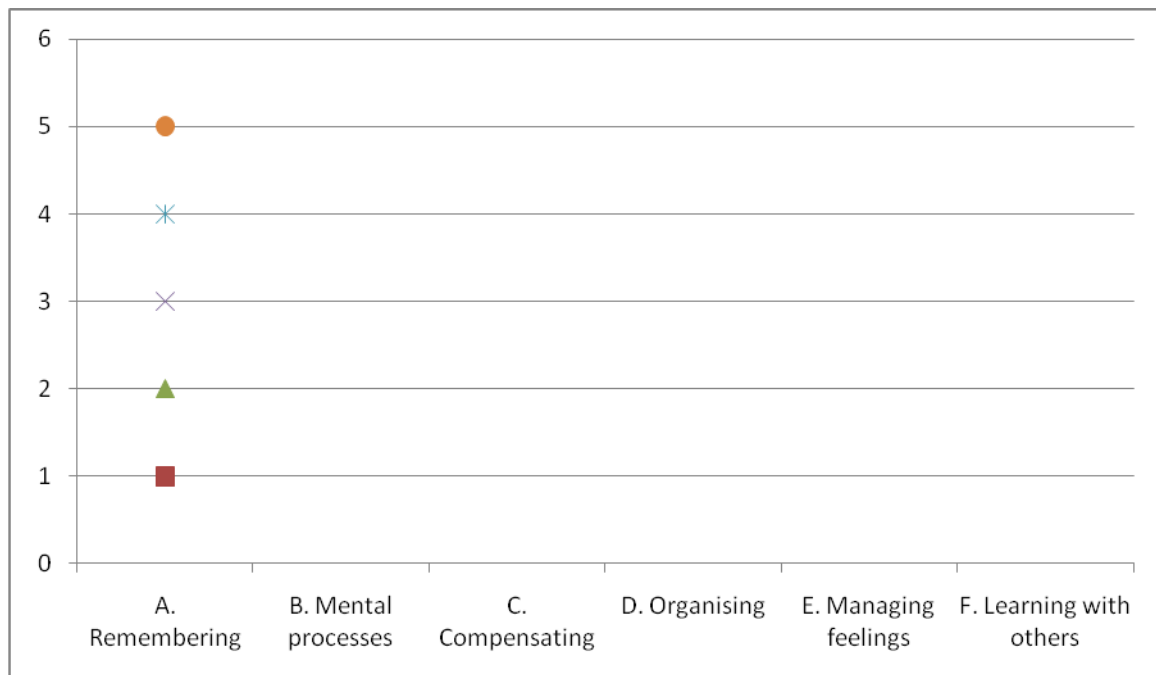
Appendix H

SILL Profile of Results

Key to understanding your averages:

High	Always or almost always used	4.5 to 5.0
	Usually used	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	Sometimes used	2.5 to 3.4
Low	Generally not used	1.5 to 2.4
	Never or almost never used	1.0 to 1.4

Graph your averages here. What does this graph tell you? Are you very high, or very low on any part?



Appendix I:

SILL questionnaire category explanations

These category explanations will be given to the students, and explained thoroughly, before the questionnaire is given. Once the questionnaire has been completed the students will be able to create their own personal profile, which will remain confidential.

Part A: _____ (your average on this part)

Remembering more effectively: grouping; making associations; placing new words into a context to remember them; using imagery, sounds, sounds and image combinations, actions etc in order to remember new expressions; reviewing in a structured way; going back to review earlier material

Part B: _____

Using your mental processes: repeating; practising with sounds and writing systems; using formulas and patterns; recombining familiar items in new ways; skimming and scanning to get the idea quickly; using reference resources; taking notes; summarising; applying general rules (deductive reasoning); analyzing expressions; analyzing by contrasting with your own language; being cautious about word-for-word translations from English into Chinese; looking for language patterns; adjusting your understanding according to new information

Part C: _____

Compensating for missing knowledge: using all possible clues to guess what is heard or read in English; trying to understand the overall meaning and not necessarily every single word; finding ways to get the message across when speaking or writing even though your English is not perfect (e.g. using gestures, switching to your own language momentarily, using a synonym or description, or coining new words)

Part D: _____

Organising and evaluating your learning: overviewing and linking with material you already know; deciding in general to pay attention; deciding to pay attention to specific details; finding out how language learning works; arranging to learn (schedule, environment, notebook); setting goals and objectives; identifying the purpose of a language task; planning for a language task; finding practice opportunities; noticing and learning from your errors; evaluating your progress

Part E: _____

Managing your emotions: lowering your anxiety; encouraging yourself through positive statements; taking risks wisely; rewarding yourself; noting physical stress; keeping a language learning diary; talking with someone about your feelings/attitudes

Part F: _____

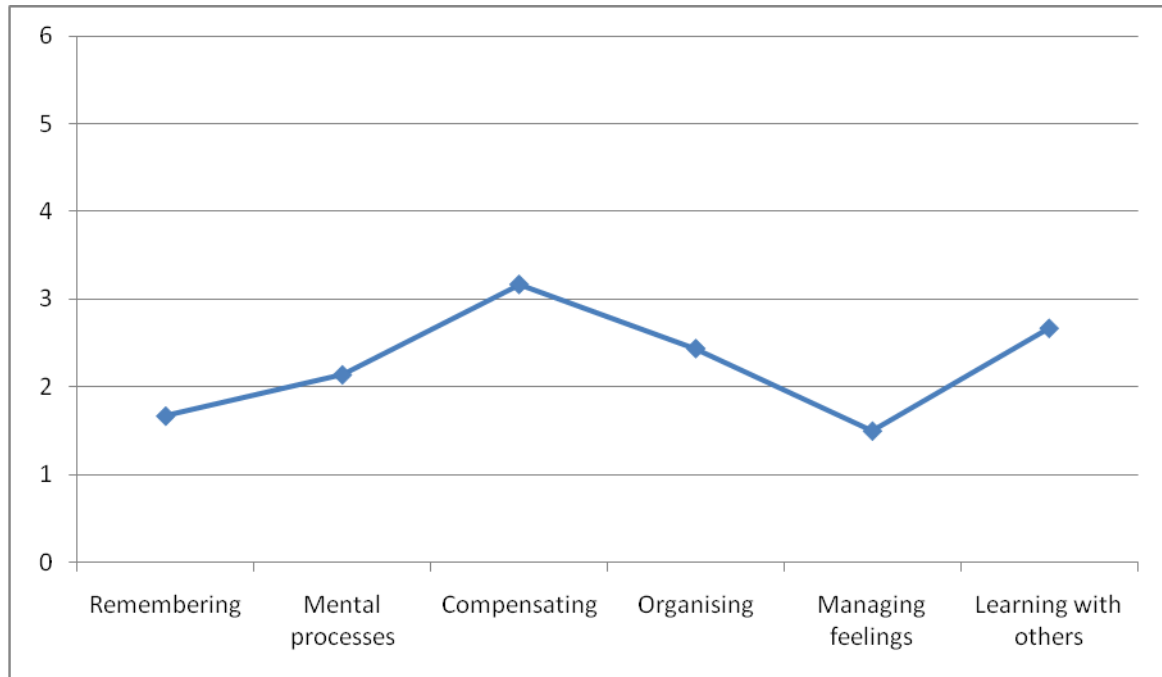
Learning with others: Asking questions for clarification; asking for correction; cooperating with peers; cooperating with proficient users of English; developing cultural awareness; becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings.

Appendix J

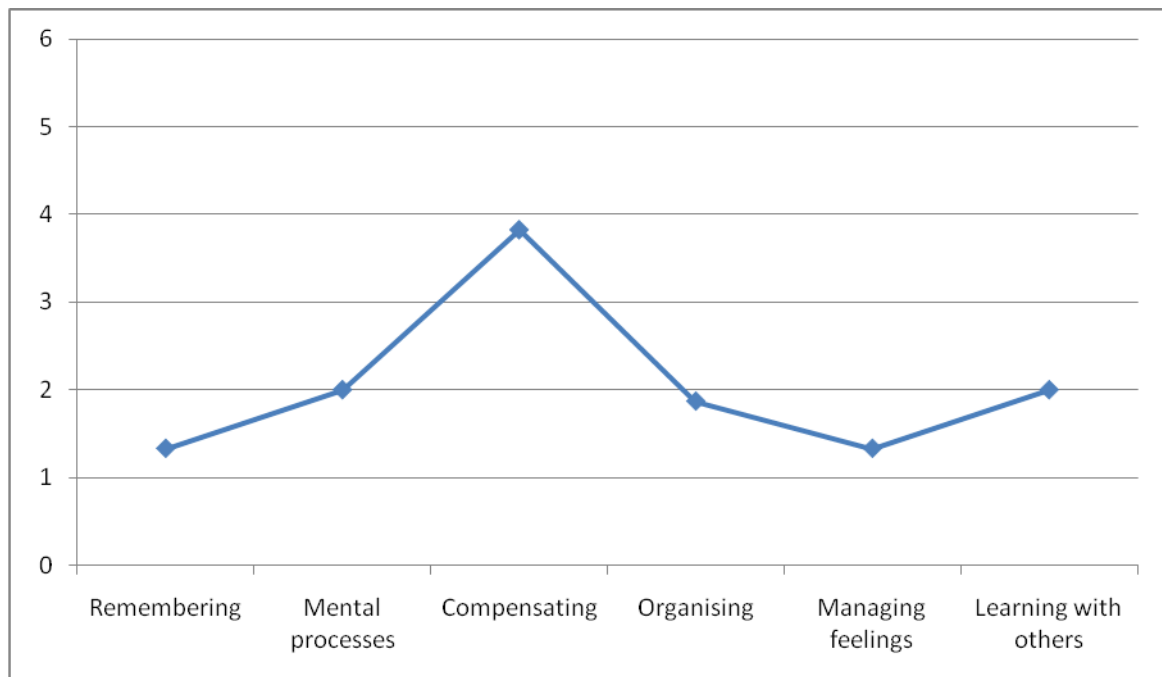
Appendix J		SILL Strategy Usage Results													
Remembering															
Part A	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Mean	sd	
1	3	2	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	4	4	3.333	0.6513	
9	1	2	3	4	4	1	4	4	4	4	5	2	3.167	1.3371	
2	1	2	2	2	4	1	2	2	4	5	3	4	2.667	1.3027	
4	3	1	1	4	4	3	1	2	4	3	1	2	2.417	1.2401	
3	2	1	1	2	2	4	1	1	2	3	2	3	2.000	0.9535	
8	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	3	2	4	2	2	2.000	0.8528	
7	1	1	5	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	3	1.750	1.2154	
5	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	2	2	1	1	3	1.500	0.7977	
6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1.167	0.5774	
Sum	15	12	19	24	22	17	17	21	22	25	22	24	20.000	4.0227	
Usage	1.67	1.33	2.11	2.67	2.44	1.89	1.89	2.33	2.44	2.78	2.44	2.67	2.223	0.4472	
Mental processes															
Part B	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12			
11	1	2	3	3	5	5	3	5	5	4	5	3	3.667	1.3707	
10	3	1	4	5	5	2	2	3	5	5	5	3	3.583	1.4434	
19	4	3	5	3	3	4	2	4	3	3	5	3	3.500	0.9045	
12	3	1	3	3	5	2	4	4	5	4	4	3	3.417	1.1645	
18	2	3	3	4	2	4	5	3	2	4	4	4	3.333	0.9847	
15	2	2	3	4	3	5	3	2	3	5	3	4	3.250	1.0553	
14	3	3	4	2	3	4	3	4	3	2	2	4	3.083	0.7930	
22	2	1	4	3	4	2	3	4	4	4	2	2	2.917	1.0836	
21	1	3	3	5	4	1	2	3	4	3	2	2	2.750	1.2154	
17	1	2	2	2	4	4	2	2	4	2	4	4	2.750	1.1382	
13	3	2	2	3	4	2	1	3	4	3	2	4	2.750	0.9653	
20	2	3	3	2	4	1	3	4	4	2	1	2	2.583	1.0836	
16	1	1	3	3	2	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	2.250	0.9653	
23	2	1	2	4	2	1	1	4	2	2	2	3	2.167	1.0299	
Sum	30	28	44	46	50	38	36	47	50	46	44	45	42.000	7.3485	
Usage	2.14	2.00	3.14	3.29	3.57	2.71	2.57	3.36	3.57	3.29	3.14	3.21	3.000	0.5249	
Compensating															
Part C	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Mean	sd	
29	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4.833	0.3892	
24	2	4	5	4	4	4	3	4	5	4	3	2	4	3.667	0.9847
27	4	5	3	3	4	1	4	3	4	4	4	4	3.583	0.9962	
25	3	3	4	4	4	4	1	4	4	4	3	4	5	3.583	0.9962
28	2	4	3	1	3	2	5	4	3	2	1	2	2.667	1.2309	
26	3	2	1	2	3	4	1	1	3	4	2	3	2.417	1.0836	
Sum	19	23	21	18	23	19	20	21	23	21	18	23	20.750	1.9598	
Usage	3.17	3.83	3.50	3.00	3.83	3.17	3.33	3.50	3.83	3.50	3.00	3.83	3.458	0.3266	
Organising and evaluating															
Part D	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Mean	sd	
32	4	2	5	5	5	4	4	3	5	5	3	3	4.000	1.0445	
31	3	3	3	4	5	5	3	5	2	5	4	3	3	3.583	0.9962
33	2	2	4	4	5	2	4	3	5	4	3	4	3.500	1.0871	
30	3	1	4	5	4	2	4	2	4	4	2	2	3.083	1.2401	
35	3	1	3	4	3	2	2	2	3	4	2	4	2.750	0.9653	
37	2	2	1	3	3	1	3	2	3	2	2	4	2.333	0.8876	
38	3	2	2	3	3	1	2	2	3	4	1	2	2.333	0.8876	
36	1	1	2	3	2	1	1	3	2	4	2	4	2.167	1.1146	
34	1	1	5	3	2	1	1	2	2	3	2	1	2.000	1.2060	
Sum	22	15	29	34	32	17	26	21	32	34	20	27	25.750	6.6623	
Usage	2.44	1.67	3.22	3.78	3.56	1.89	2.89	2.33	3.56	3.78	2.22	3.00	2.861	0.7403	
Managing feelings															
Part E	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Mean	sd	
40	3	3	3	4	5	3	1	4	5	3	4	3	3.417	1.084	
39	1	1	4	2	5	3	1	1	5	3	3	3	2.667	1.497	
42	2	1	3	3	5	4	1	1	5	1	1	1	2.333	1.614	
41	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	2	3	2	2	4	1.833	1.030	
44	1	1	3	3	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1.750	0.754	
43	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.083	0.289	
Sum	9	8	15	15	21	13	6	10	21	12	13	14	13.083	4.641	
Usage	1.50	1.33	2.50	2.50	3.50	2.17	1.00	1.67	3.50	2.00	2.17	2.33	2.181	0.773	
Learning with others															
Part F	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	Mean	sd	
45	4	1	4	5	5	4	1	3	4	2	4	3	3.333	1.3707	
47	5	5	4	4	3	1	5	1	3	1	5	3	3.333	1.6143	
49	4	3	4	3	1	1	4	2	4	3	4	4	3.083	1.1645	
48	1	1	5	4	5	4	1	2	4	2	3	2	2.833	1.5275	
46	1	1	3	3	5	3	1	4	4	1	3	4	2.750	1.4222	
50	1	1	4	4	2	1	5	2	5	3	1	4	2.750	1.6026	
Sum	16	12	24	23	21	14	17	14	24	12	20	20	18.083	4.5017	
Usage	2.67	2.00	4.00	3.83	3.50	2.33	2.83	2.33	4.00	2.00	3.33	3.33	3.014	0.7503	
Mean	2.27	2.03	3.08	3.18	3.4	2.36	2.42	2.59	3.47	2.89	2.72	3.06			

Appendix K

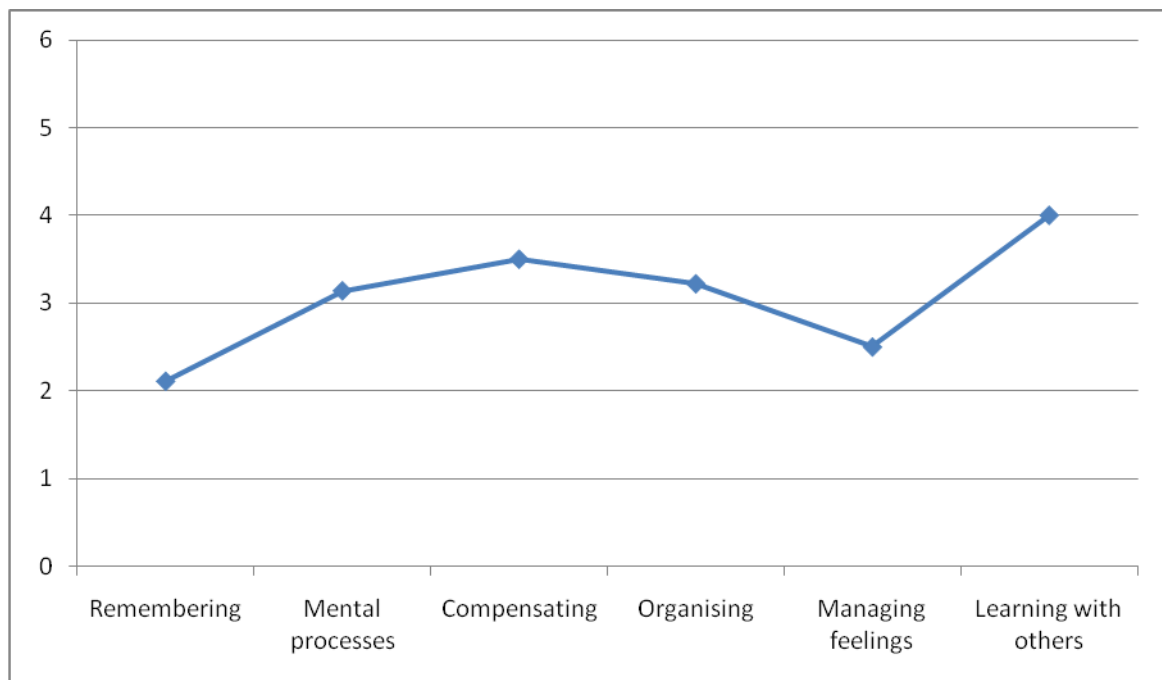
Individual participant overall SILL results



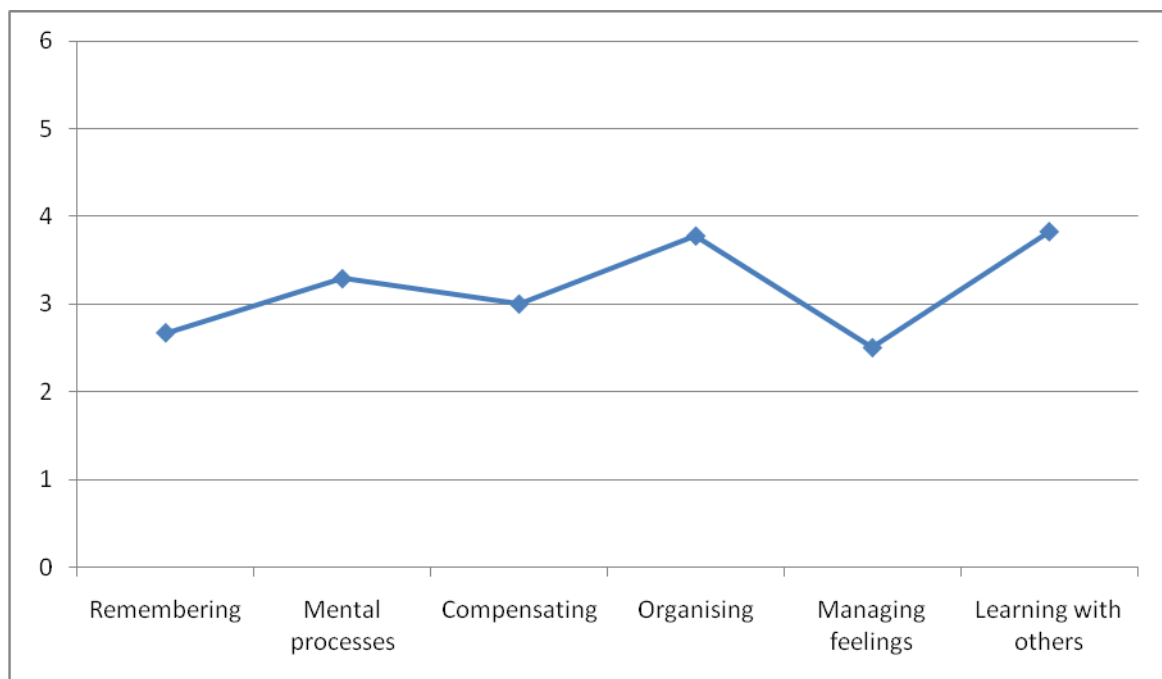
P1



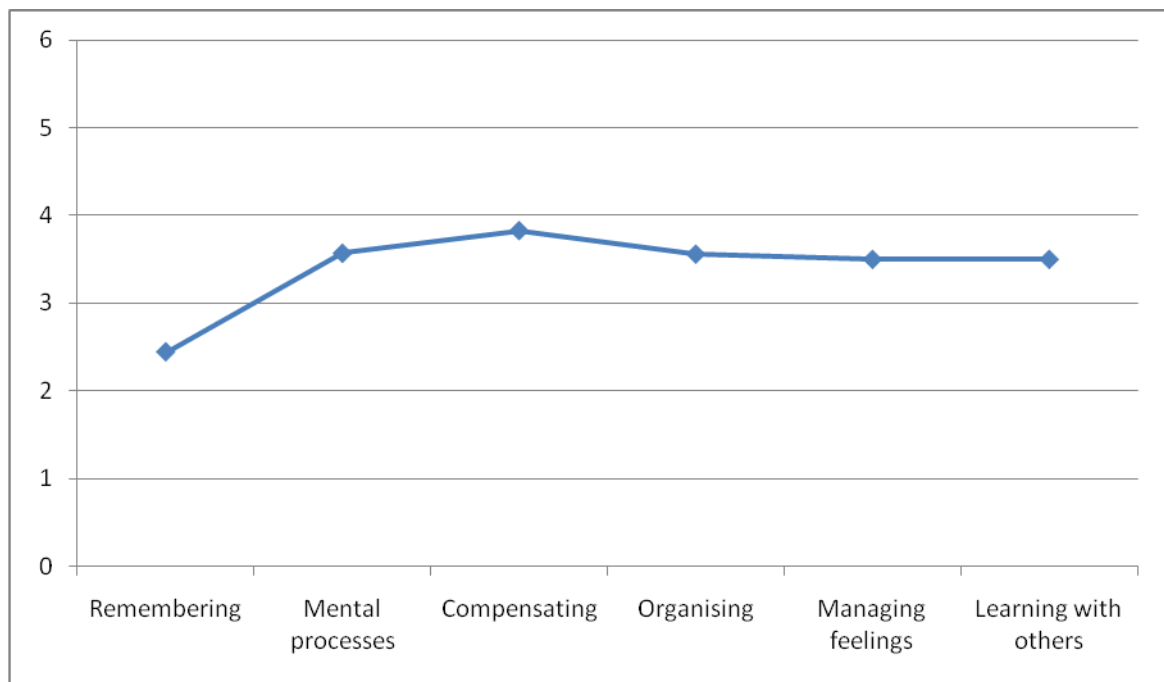
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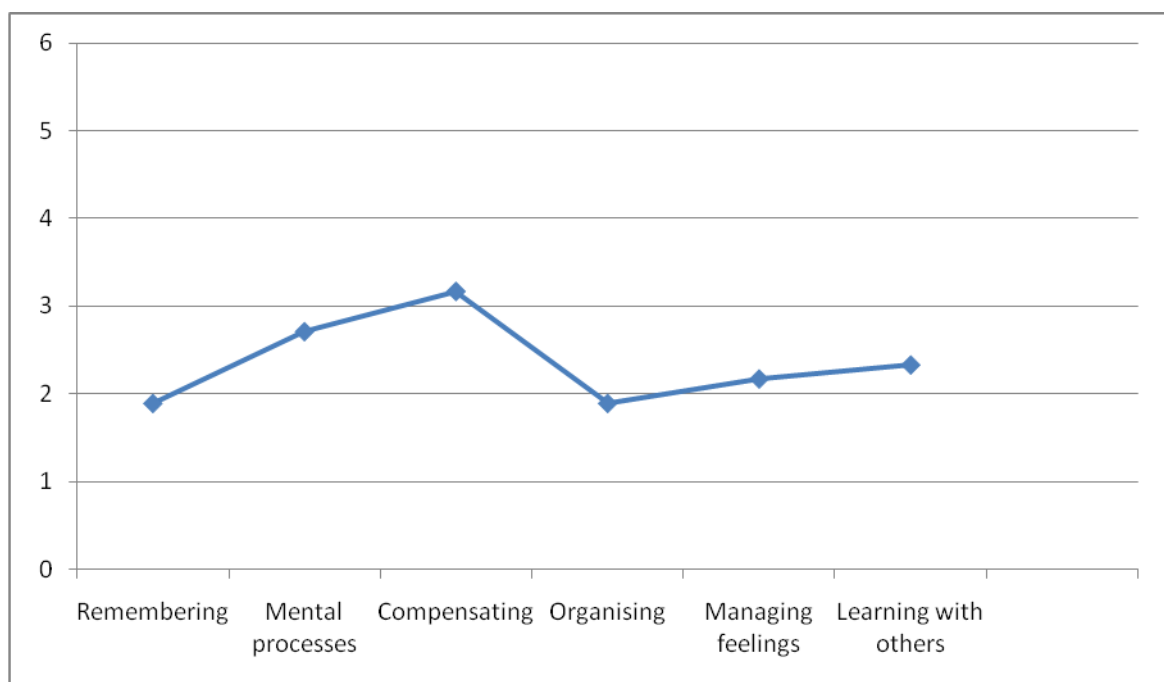
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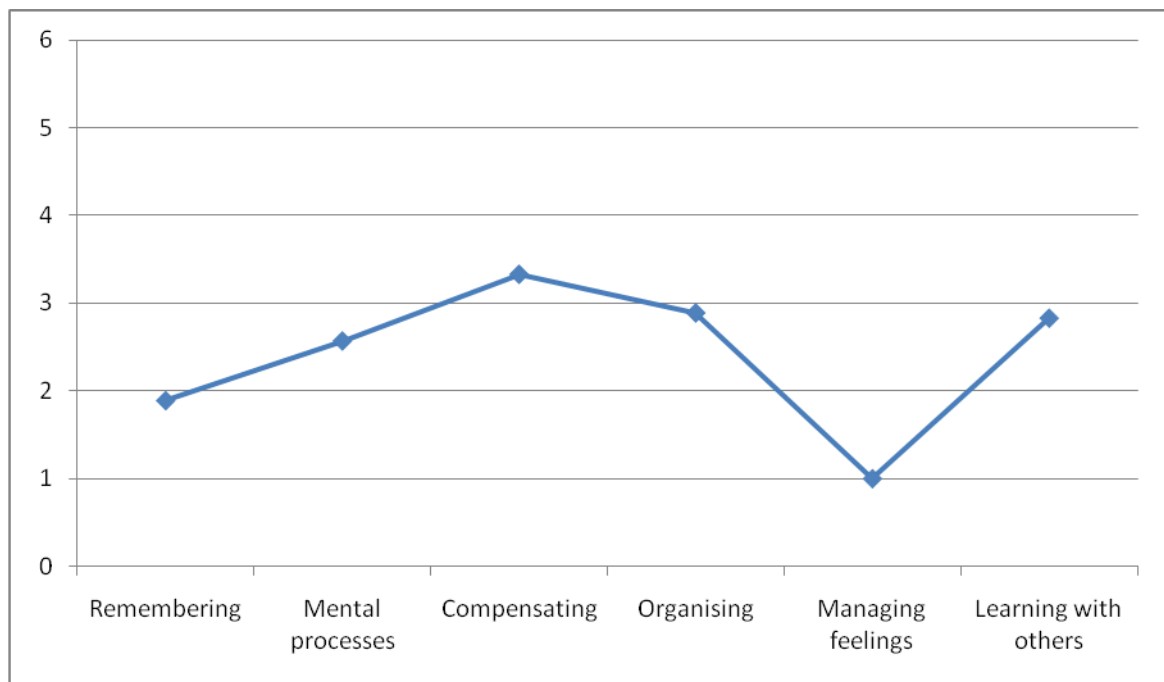
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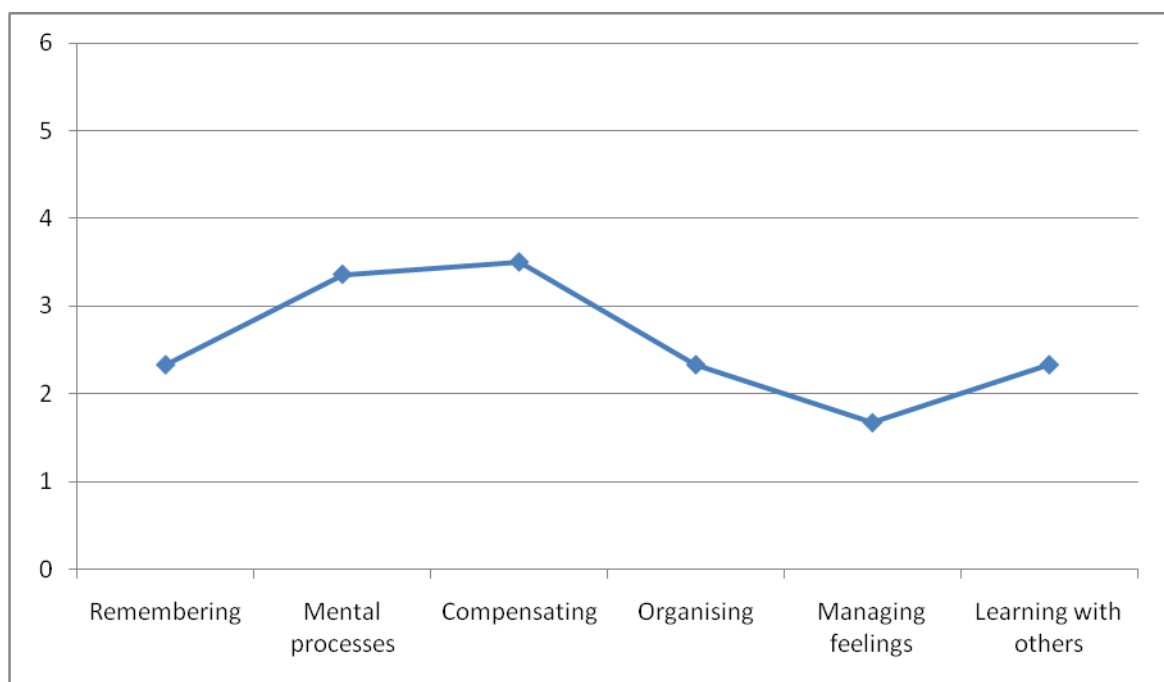
P5



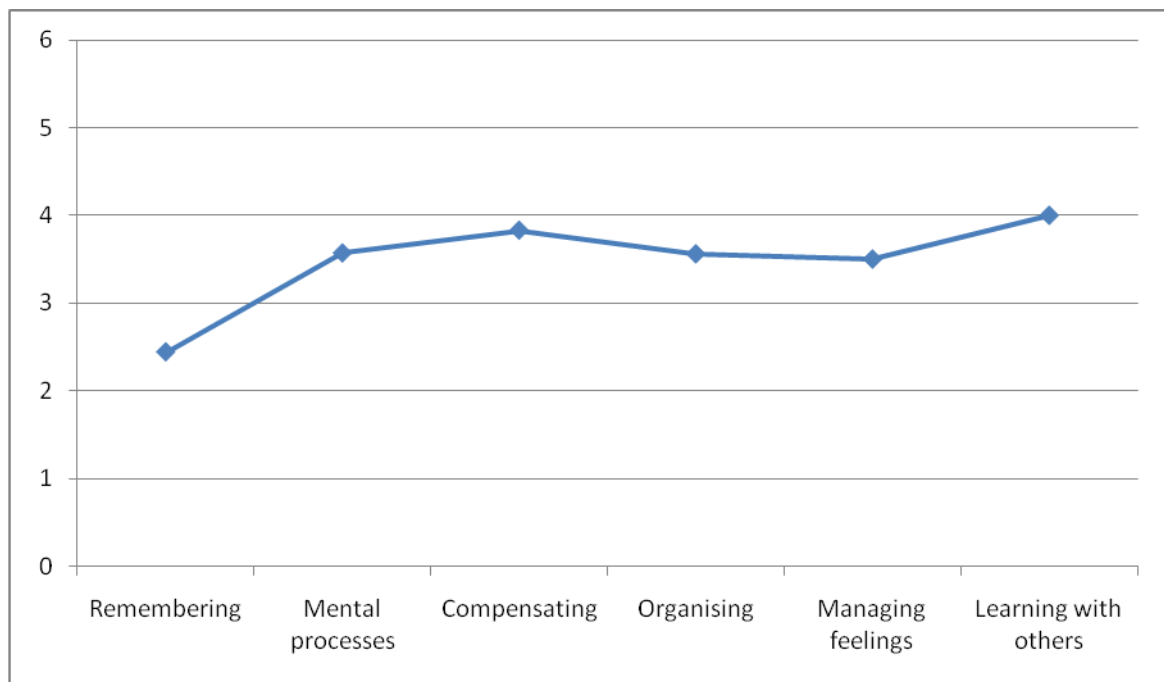
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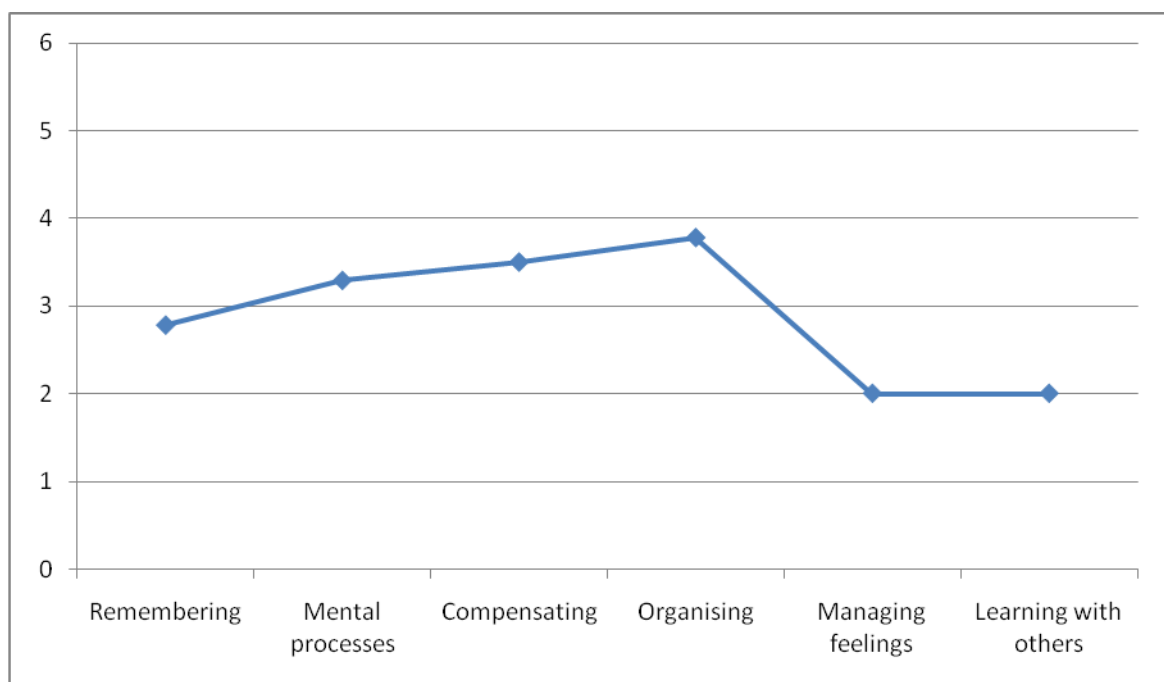
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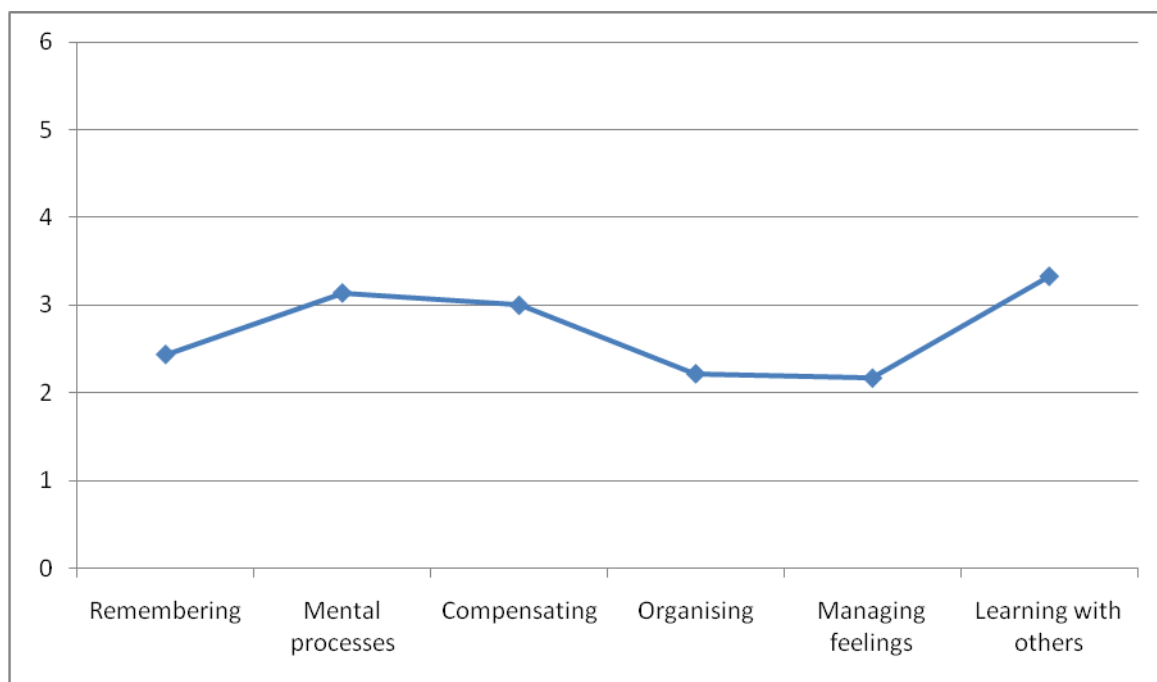
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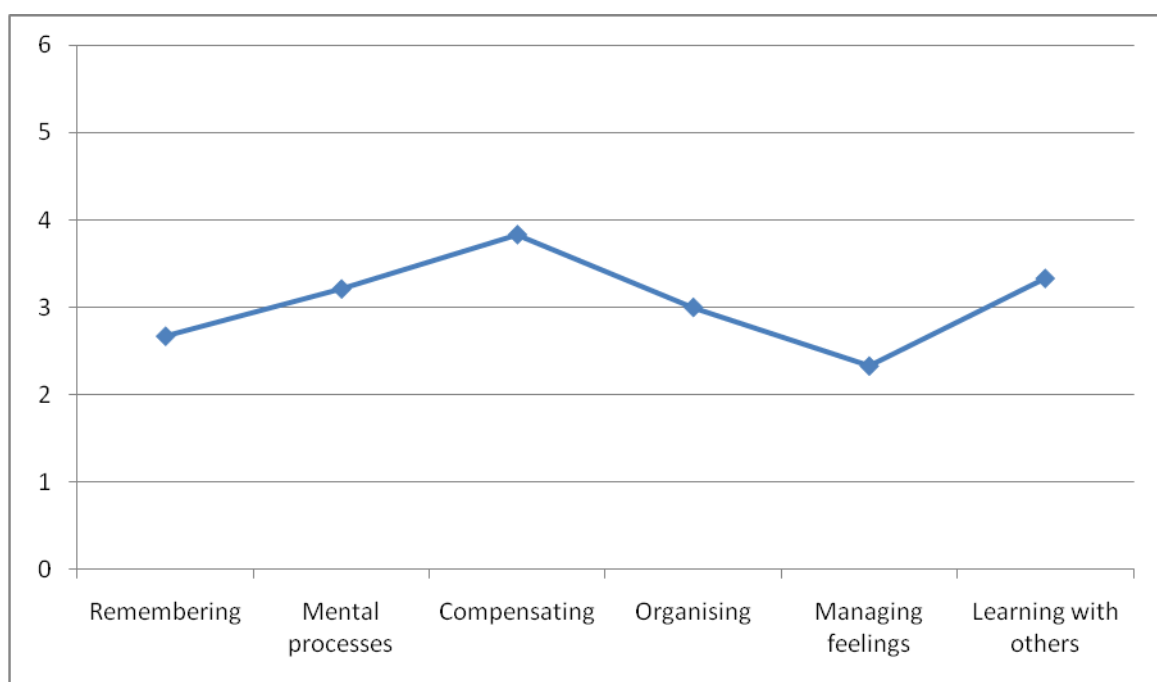
P9



P10



P11



P12

Appendix L

Focus Group 1 – Transcript excerpt (Page 1 of 8)

Interviewer:

We've just been discussing language strategies which are the way we actually learn and especially with regard to learning English and speaking English in particular so I've got a few questions that I would like to put to you all and thank you all for coming. Firstly we have done this little questionnaire and which language strategies do you use the most and think are the most effective?

P9

I think it's learning with others probably. When I was in Canada I try to speak with Korean speakers and I try to talk to like English speakers and try to copy their accent.

Interviewer:

That's a definite strategy.

P5

Yeah I agree with him because I think learning with others is very important for us, we can compare with others, if we have the comparison we know what level we have and maybe we can take a difference approach targets for ourselves and we try to get that target is better for our to learn the English so I think that learning with others is the most important one.

Interviewer:

Great okay.

P14

I think learning with others is effective way not only to co-operate to the native speakers but also their partners or like our classmates because through this way you can improve yourself fast and when you are not study as fast as others you can catch the most meaning of others and remember the (unclear 0:02:34)

Interviewer:

Right, thanks.

P8

I think remembering more effective is quite important because when we learn a new language there's a lot of words and phrases that you can use in different situations and different times but if we can memorise them with effective way we can use it at correct situations and to make our English improve.

Interviewer:

Thanks.

P12

I just have (unclear 0:03:07) when we speak with others I think about words is very important.

Appendix M

Interview transcript excerpt with P9 (Page 1 of 3)

Interviewer:

Thanks very much for coming along to do this interview. I really appreciate it. We've been discussing language learning strategies especially with regard to producing spoken English but strategies in general. Which language strategies do you use the most and think are the most effective?

P9:

I think learning with others I use the most. Maybe not in China here, but when I was in Canada I always try to speak to English speakers not my native Korean speakers. And I actually improved a lot during short period of time and yeah and but I came to China and have less opportunity to talk to native English speakers but still I am always trying to.

Interviewer:

Yeah to do that. Were there any strategies in the questionnaire that we did that you think might help you to become a better language learner?

P9

Maybe remembering more effectively or organising and evaluating my learning like because I always had problem with vocabularies like shortage of vocabulary. All the teachers that I met they all said if I improve more vocabulary then I will be the better English speaker.

Interviewer:

That certainly helps. Okay maybe connected with that do you think increased motivation might change the strategies that you're using now for example if you were going into a bridging programme say at a foreign university you suddenly had to improve your IELTS band score by one or two band score levels, is there anything that you think you would focus on that is different?

P9

Definitely I think there's going to be a big change there because even though I like to use like learning with others, this strategy, like if I but if I had to like have a test (unclear 0:02:54) then I have to like more focused on like remembering more effectively and organise my schedule so I think there's going to be a big change.

Interviewer:

Do you think that people who have different reasons for learning to speak English might use different strategies, for example maybe between you as a student, an IELTS student, maybe compared with someone and adult perhaps who's or anybody who's emigrating to a foreign country they might have different reasons for learning to speak English do you think their strategies might be different?

P9

Yes because students we have to more study on writings like essays and reading those text books or we might like improve like our reading and writing skills and we also have to improve listening and speaking but those, that person who want to emigrate (continued...)