Study on Students' English Learning Strategies

—Take the Students Majoring in Chinese Language and Literature as Examples

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Abstract: The research on foreign language learning strategies in academic circles mainly began around 1970. During this period, the focus of foreign language teaching in the world gradually changed from "how to teach" to "how to learn". Therefore, it is necessary to study the use of learning strategies in different groups of students. This can be a reference for their future learning effect. This paper answers the question of whether and how to focus on the choice of six English learning strategies for some Chinese language and literature majors. 51 students participated in the study and answered a questionnaire with 61 questions. The questionnaire in this study has a reliability measurement of 0.981 and validity measurement of 0.614, which is a questionnaire that can extract data effectively. The data analysis shows that the frequency of the compensation strategy is higher than the other five types of strategies, which is followed by memory strategy. Metacognitive strategy is the third and cognitive strategy is the fourth. Affective strategy is behind on metacognitive strategy, and social strategy is the least.

Keywords: EFL learning strategies, Chinese language and literature, undergraduates

1. Introduction

Research on foreign language learning strategies was began in the 1970s. In the past, the teaching of foreign language in the world mainly focused on how to teach, but in the 1970s, it gradually shifted to the learners, that is, how to learn. Understanding the students' use of learning strategies is of great help to improve their learning efficiency. This allows them to improve their English level in a more targeted way.

In 1989, Oxford, R and Nyikos, M researched the factors that affect the choice of the second language learning strategies [1]. This study indicated that formal rules related practice strategies are high usage, while functional practice strategy is the least frequently used of all strategies. In 1990, the Oxford published a book, which was called *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*. The book fully describes the language learning strategies and provides a broad research background [2]. Rebecca published a study on two language acquisition strategies in 1992 [3]. In this paper, the author reviews the related studies outside the second language area that may influence research into how students learn new languages. Besides, Chamot talked the effect of

learning strategies which were used in the second language learning in 2014 [4]. Furthermore, Lestari, M. & Wahyudin, A. Y. show that metacognitive strategies are used most frequently, followed by social and compensation strategies, and affective strategies are the lowest in 2020 [5].

The change of the focus of world foreign language teaching has an importantly guiding significance for the study of Chinese students' English learning strategies. Following that trend, a wave of research on students' English learning strategies has been launched in China. Huang Xiaohua was the first researcher in China. In 1984, this scholar published a study on the learning strategies of Oral English among Chinese English students; in 1992, Wu Yi'an and Liu Runqing published a survey of undergraduate English students in China; in 1995, Wen Qiufang discussed the influence of different learning methods on academic performance through the study of successful and unsuccessful English learners [6,7]. By the end of the 20th century, professors at Nanjing University had explored how college students' English learning strategies had changed and the characteristics of the change [8]. The study shows that through two years of study in university, the trend of language learning strategy change is as follows: formal practice is up first and then down, functional practice strategy shows a straight upward trend, while native language strategy is the first down and then slightly up. In addition, this study also illustrates that the first year of college is a critical period for changes in English learning strategies.

In the 21st century, globalization has deepened, and the world is becoming more integrated. Many scholars have conducted a new round of research on the English learning strategies of college students. For example, in 2022, Jia Zaijun conducted research on oral English learning strategies for Chinese students studying in the UK [9]. His finding showed that memory strategies were the most widely used, followed by cognitive, compensatory and metacognitive strategies, with affective and social strategies scoring the lowest of the six categories of strategies in Chinese students studying in the UK. Predecessors for Chinese college students' English learning strategy research mainly focuses on English professional students in college, or students who are living in an English-language environment, by contrast the English non-professional students are less involved. It can be seen that Gao Yue did the English professional students on English vocabulary learning strategy research in 2004 and Lv Hongyan studied the English professional college students' oral learning strategy on 2010 [10,11]. In Gao's survey, he mentioned the effect of gender on learning strategies. Compared with boys, girls are better at using metacognitive strategies to plan their own learning. Relative to the boys, in vocabulary learning, they are good at using some association strategy and they are more expert in the active use, more frequently through extensive reading and reciting articles to learn vocabulary and can use a variety of ways to regulate anxiety, have strong perseverance and self-control. But boys only in the use of some classification strategies better than girls. From the perspective of vocabulary strategy research, the results verify that gender is an important factor which affects the choice of learning strategies to some extent. Apart from that, females are more and better users of learning strategies [10]. In Lv's study, the findings also indicated that the use of spoken English learning strategies was negatively correlated with the degree of oral learning anxiety [11]. In foreign countries, most of the research in recent years focuses on the research of learning strategies in some aspects of English, such as vocabulary learning strategies and writing learning strategies. The research on vocabulary learning strategies includes Azadi, H..'s study on English learners in Iran, published in 2021; Okyar, H. Vocabulary learning strategies of Turkish EFL learners: a focus on gender [12, 13]. The research on writing learning strategies includes: Xiaowen's study, which was published in 2021 [14]. It can be seen that there are relatively few studies on English learning strategies for non-English majors. There is no special research on English learning strategies for Chinese language students. Because of Chinese and English learning belong to the language learning, and Chinese college students native Chinese. Whether Chinese language's specialty has influence on the survey or not is unknown. For the

particularity of Chinese learning and the research for English learning strategy, if the results of the measurement will have a different is still considerable.

Among the above topics, the choice of English learning strategies of the Chinese college students who are surveyed is mainly due to the pursuit of foreign language accuracy and the need for communication [8].

This study focuses on the selection of learning strategies for undergraduates majoring in Chinese language and literature. Data collection and analysis were conducted through the questionnaire survey method and the SPSSAU data analysis platform. The significance of the research is that people can obtain some characteristics of such students' strategy selection, and can guide their future strategy selection, so as to help such students to better learn English.

2. Method

2.1. The Research Subjects

The subjects of this study are all undergraduates majoring in Chinese language and literature. The subjects include a total of 51 people, including 26 boys and 25 girls. All of the people filled out the questionnaire carefully within a week after its distribution.

2.2. The Research Process

Firstly, this study used strategic classification based on cognitive, metacognitive and emotional psychological functions, etc, which is classified into memory, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The authority of the scale of language learning strategies, based on this classification method, has been demonstrated in Oxford, R. L., 1995. Secondly, this study will use the SILL. First, it is easy and quick with low cost; second, it has high confidentiality without easy data leakage, and third, it provides immediate learner feedback [15]. In addition, this classification is more detailed, compared to that of O'Malley & Chamot in 1990 [16]. After collecting data, SPSSAU, a statistical software of social science, is used for data analysis. The data analysis mainly consists of two parts: First, analyze the average and standard deviation of each strategy selection; Second, compare the frequency of each strategy.

In this English learning strategy scale, language learning strategies are evaluated into six categories: memory strategy, cognitive strategy, compensation strategy, metacognitive strategy, affective strategy and social strategy. This questionnaire consists of 60 items, divided into 7 parts: 1. Basic information of students, 2. Memory strategy, 3. Cognitive strategy, 4. Compensation strategy, 5. Metacognitive strategy, 6. affective strategy, 7. social strategy. Except for the first part, the other parts are choice questions, each multiple-choice question is divided into five options: 1. never, 2. sometimes, 3. often, 4. usually, 5. always. A total of 51 samples were collected, all of whom were undergraduate students majoring in Chinese language and literature. Table 1 below shows the questions in the learning strategy section.

Table 1: Learning strategy questions.

The type of strategy	Questionnaire content	Question number
Memory strategy	use new words in your sentences, consider the relationships between known and unknown words, combine sounds and images together, use your own imagination, employ rhyme, use cards as a help, physically embody the words, do review at regular intervals, keep in mind the location,	9

Table 1: (continued).

Cognitive strategy	repeat the words you're saying or writing, try to speak like a native speaker, exercise noises, use several word combinations, initiate interactions, watch TV or movies, enjoy reading, compose memos, emails, etc. skim, and then carefully read, look for synonymous substitution in different languages, recognize patterns, reword words to make sense, avoid translating verbatim, write summaries,	14
Compensation strategy	make an educated guess, making motions, coin new terms, read aloud without a dictionary, predict the speaker's next words, employ a euphemism or synonym,	6
Metacognitive strategy	find all kinds of ways to use English, if possible, pay attention to mistakes, focus on the speaker, find the method that can learn more effectively, manage your schedule, find conversation partners, hunt for reading options, and more, set specific objectives, consider progress,	9
Affective strategy	calming down when afraid, encouraging myself to speak when afraid, rewarding myself, noticing tension, keeping a learning journal, discussing feelings,	6
Social strategy	ask someone for some slowness or repetition, request correction, practice with somebody among other things, get assistance from native speakers, ask questions, research the culture.	6

3. Result

3.1. Reliability Analysis

The clonal Bach reliability coefficient (Cronbachα coefficient) was used for this data reliability analysis. The analysis result is 0.981. It is higher than 0.8, which means that the reliability of the scale is very good (see Table 2).

Table 2: Cronbach reliability analysis.

Number of terms	Sample capacity	Cronbach α Coefficient
51	51	0.981

3.2. Validity Analysis

Testing has revealed that all of the study items' common degree values are higher than 0.4, demonstrating the efficiency with which the research item information may be collected. Also, the data can be successfully extracted because the KMO value is 0.614, which is higher than 0.6.

In order to study and compare the frequency of each learning strategy, the author compared the average and standard deviation algorithm on SPSSAU platform.

3.3. Analysis of the Means of Each Learning Strategy

This paper calculates the average of the strategy by dividing the total number of questions.

3.3.1. Memory Strategy

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of each question of the memory strategy.

Table 3: Outcomes of the memory strategy analysis.

Question	Sample capacity	M	SD	M±SD
use new words in your sentences,	51	3.176	1.307	3.176±1.307
consider the relationships between known and unknown words,	51	3.510	1.065	3.510±1.065
connect sounds and images,	51	3.647	1.110	3.647±1.110
use your imagination,	51	3.314	1.241	3.314±1.241
employ rhyme,	51	3.490	1.120	3.490±1.120
use flash cards,	51	3.157	1.255	3.157±1.255
physically embody the words,	51	2.431	1.221	2.431±1.221
regularly review,	51	3.176	1.126	3.176±1.126
keep in mind the location,	51	3.137	1.217	3.137±1.217

Thus, the average of the memory strategy is 3.226, and the standard deviation is 1.185.

3.3.2. Cognitive Strategy

Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviation of each question of the cognitive strategy.

Table 4: Outcomes of the cognitive strategy analysis.

Question	Sample capacity	M	SD	M±SD
repeat the words you're saying or writing,	51	3.196	1.096	3.196±1.096
try to speak like a native speaker,	51	2.824	1.292	2.824±1.292
exercise noises,	51	3.373	1.216	3.373±1.216
use several word combinations,	51	3.333	1.244	3.333±1.244
initiate interactions	51	2.549	1.286	2.549±1.286
watch TV or movies,	51	3.588	1.268	3.588±1.268
enjoy reading,	51	2.157	1.377	2.157±1.377
compose memos, emails, letters, or reports,	51	2.490	1.286	2.490±1.286
skim, and then read	51	3.196	1.217	3.196±1.217
look for parallel words in different languages,	51	3.078	1.246	3.078±1.246
recognize patterns,	51	3.196	1.149	3.196±1.149
reword words to make sense,	51	3.490	1.223	3.490±1.223
avoid translating verbatim,	51	3.098	1.253	3.098±1.253
write summaries,	51	2.627	1.341	2.627±1.341

The average number of this strategy is 3.014, and the standard deviation is 1.250.

3.3.3. Compensation Strategy

Table 5 is the mean and standard deviations for the compensation strategy questions.

Table 5: Outcomes of the compensation strategy analysis.

Question	Sample capacity	M	SD	M±SD
make an educated guess,	51	3.804	1.114	3.804±1.114
making motions,	51	2.980	1.273	2.980±1.273
coin new terms,	51	3.078	1.324	3.078±1.324
read aloud without a dictionary,	51	3.706	1.137	3.706±1.137
predict the speaker's next words,	51	2.588	1.344	2.588±1.344
employ a euphemism or synonym,	51	3.804	1.249	3.804±1.249

The average of the compensation strategy is 3.327, and the standard deviation is 1.240.

3.3.4. Metacognitive Strategy

Table 6 is the mean and standard deviations for the metacognitive strategy questions.

Table 6: Outcomes of the metacognitive strategy analysis.

Question	Sample capacity	M	SD	M±SD
find as many ways as possible to use English,	51	3.196	1.184	3.196±1.184
notice mistakes,	51	3.176	1.144	3.176±1.144
pay attention to the speaker,	51	3.510	1.138	3.510±1.138
find out how to learn more effectively,	51	3.490	1.138	3.490±1.138
manage your schedule,	51	3.078	1.111	3.078±1.111
find conversation partners,	51	2.627	1.232	2.627±1.232
hunt for reading options, and more,	51	3.000	1.296	3.000±1.296
set specific objectives,	51	3.000	1.200	3.000±1.200
consider progress,	51	3.216	1.137	3.216±1.137

The average of the metacognitive strategy is 3.144, and the standard deviation is 1.049.

3.3.5. Affective Strategy

Table 7 is the mean and standard deviations for the affective strategy questions.

Table 7: Outcomes of the affective strategy analysis.

Question	Sample capacity	M	SD	M±SD
calming down when afraid,	51	3.157	1.206	3.157±1.206
encouraging myself to speak when afraid,	51	2.843	1.239	2.843±1.239
rewarding myself,	51	3.000	1.281	3.000±1.281
noticing tension,	51	3.275	1.168	3.275±1.168
keeping a learning journal,	51	2.294	1.460	2.294±1.460
discussing feelings,	51	2.961	1.296	2.961±1.296

The average of the affective strategy is 2.922, and the standard deviation is 1.275.

3.3.6. Social Strategy

Table 8 below is the mean and standard deviations for the social strategy questions.

Table 8: Outcomes of the social strategy analysis.

Question	Sample capacity	M	SD	M±SD
ask for slowness or repetition,	51	3.451	1.238	3.451±1.238
request correction,	51	2.980	1.257	2.980±1.257
practice with others among other things,	51	2.627	1.264	2.627±1.264
get assistance from native speakers,	51	2.216	1.376	2.216±1.376
ask questions,	51	2.608	1.313	2.608±1.313
research the culture.	51	3.196	1.312	3.196±1.312

The average of the social strategy is 2.846, and the standard deviation is 1.087.

As can be seen, compensation, strategy is used more frequently than the other five types of strategies, with memory strategy coming in second. Metacognitive strategy is the third and cognitive strategy is the fourth. Affective strategy is behind on metacognitive strategy, and social strategy is the least (see Table 9).

Table 9: All types of strategies' average and standard deviation.

Strategy type	Memory strategy	Cognitive strategy	Compensation strategy	Metacognitive strategy	Affective strategy	Social strategy
M	3.226	3.014	3.327	3.144	2.922	2.846
SD	1.185	1.250	1.240	1.049	1.275	1.087

4. Discussion

According to the data, the students of this major use the compensation strategy nearly as often as the memory strategy, and their use frequency is slightly higher than other strategies. It shows that most of them still pay more attention to the accuracy of English words and grammar and they always express by using physical gestures when they cannot use the accurate words. Besides, the frequency of metacognitive strategies is in the middle, which indirectly reflects their insufficient awareness of active learning and self-monitoring. Affective and social strategies were used the least frequently. One of the reasons for this result maybe have connection with the introversion of Chinese people. They are not very willing to express their feelings to other people [9]. People make less use of social strategies, which may be caused by the lack of English communication environment [1]. Since the sample subject is special in the major that is Chinese language and literature, the school and the society do not have very high requirements for their English level. Therefore, most people learn English mostly to pass exams or simply communicate. Because of this, they also do not have a very strong learning initiative. The purpose of choosing the strategy is also more concern about improving the accuracy of English learning, so as to pass the exam. Additionally, the survey showed that one-third of the students wanted to improve their speaking and listening skills, which may be related to the less use of social strategies.

5.   Conclusions

In the past, students of Chinese Language and literature used to learn English for exams and simple communication, so their learning strategies were also inclined to memory strategies and compensation strategies. At the same time, a third of the students want to improve their speaking and listening skills, which can be achieved by increasing the use of social strategies.

Also, there are some limitations in this study. To start with, the number of samples about this survey is only 51. Besides, whether the research results are universal still needs further exploration. About the purpose of students in this major still needs further investigation to more rigorously explain the reasons for the choice of learning strategies they make.

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