Enhancing the learning experience with strategy journals: supporting the diverse learning styles of ESL/EFL students

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This paper presents initial findings of a pilot study that explores the extent to which learners of English are aware of, develop and use language learning strategies (LLS), and the effect of guided reflection on LLS. The study compares Japanese learners of English in two different learning environments – an English as a foreign language environment (Japan) and an English as a second language environment (America). Two instruments were used to examine ways in which the two groups differed: 1) a Strategy Inventory Survey asking learners the degree to which they use LLS and consider them useful, and 2) guided journals to facilitate and encourage reflection on LLS. Statistical analysis of results indicated a significant difference on the pretest between the ESL and EFL groups. All groups, including the control group, showed significant gains on post-test measures for use and usefulness, but there was no significant effect for treatment. Qualitative journal data and survey rankings of sub-parts for use and usefulness showed surprisingly few differences for all subjects regardless of environment. In support of diverse learning styles, a number of salient pedagogical implications were found for teachers of Japanese EFL and ESL students in higher education.

Introduction

The belief that learning begins with the learner is an axiom increasingly reflected worldwide in a broad range of educational contexts. In language classrooms, teachers are reminded daily that learners don’t all learn the same way or in a consistent manner. For example, Nunan, (1999) describes a metaphor of organic learning, and Gardner (1993) proposes a theory of multiple intelligences. In particular, in the fields of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), researchers investigating factors that facilitate second language acquisition have shifted their focus from characteristics of language and methods of teaching to learner characteristics. For example, amongst various trends in the EFL teaching practice at large, Griffec, (1997) reports an 84% agreement toward a focus on the learner as an individual. To help students become better language learners many specialists recognize the importance of learner autonomy and encourage learners to take increasing responsibility in shaping their learning (e.g. Little and Dam, 1998; Lee, 1998). This includes helping learners to make informed and appropriate choices about learning (Holec, 1981). In fact, Nunan (1999) suggests that a capable language learner is “one who can make effective choices in terms of learning tasks and strategies.” (p. 193).

In particular, language learning strategies (LLS) are a topic of growing interest for a number of teachers and researchers. Among the various perspectives and extensive avenues of inquiry in this field (e.g., Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Naiman et al, 1978; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Lessard-Clouston, 1997; Cohen, 1998), it has been suggested that being exposed to and even using LLS may not ensure success in language learning (Skehan, 1989), especially if the learners do not metacognitively connect their strategies and language use (Vann & Abraham, 1990). Similar to this is Schmidt’s (1990) theory that acquisition is facilitated by noticing features of the language. One potentially effective means of encouraging learners to notice or make this
connection is to have them reflect on their experiences learning and using the target language.

The information reported here comes from a pilot study in which we used strategy-inventory survey and guided journals to examine the degree to which learners report using LLS and consider LLS to be useful. The aim of our study is to explore and compare the extent to which Japanese learners in EFL and ESL environments are aware of, develop, and use LLS. The following research questions were posed:

1. Do participants in an EFL environment differ from participants in an ESL environment in (a) their reported use of LLS, and (b) the degree to which they perceive LLS to be useful?
2. Are there any salient strategies which learners identify using more frequently? How does this vary between ESL and EFL?
3. Are there any salient strategies which learners consider more useful? How does this vary between ESL and EFL?
4. Is there any evidence that metacognitive reflection on strategies leads to greater use or an increased perceived usefulness of LLS?

Rationale

To date, a number of studies have examined learners' awareness of LLS, what kinds of LLS are in their repertoires, and the learners' reasons for using them. There have also been numerous studies that looked at the effects of exposure to or instruction of LLS. However, we found less evidence of comparative studies of LLS, particularly comparisons of ESL and EFL environments. Therefore, this study will help to fill this gap by comparing the kinds of strategies that are used and/or considered useful by similar learners in ESL and EFL environments. This study also explores the effects that metacognitive reflection has on students' perceptions of use and usefulness of LLS, based on our belief that students’ reflection on how they learn leads to more control over their own learning. In addition, the study proposes to further shed light on pedagogical concerns, in particular how ESL and EFL learners in higher education might benefit from strategy awareness and development. Since learners often have a limited awareness of LLS, there is value in making them known to help facilitate the learning process. The study also looks at whether the learning environment might affect and change the extent to which LLS are used and considered useful by learners, thus impacting teaching styles and methodology.

Subjects

The subjects for this pilot study included 28 Japanese ESL students attending two language programs in Hawaii, and 28 Japanese EFL students attending a university in Japan, with another 26 EFL university students in Japan serving as a control group. The students in Hawaii attended 16-20 hours of classes in English per week for a 10-week term. The students in Japan attended between 90 minutes and 6 hours of classes in English per week for a 14-week term. All the students had at least 6 years of English at school or university, and all were in the mid-beginner to low-intermediate range of ability. Similarities in mean ages, years of education and years of English indicate that similar groups are being compared.
Design and data collection

This is exploratory and descriptive research using naturally existing classes for the purpose of data collection. In a pre-treatment briefing session, the researchers gave learners an overview of the study, administered the strategy-inventory survey, and reviewed a sample strategy journal to give the learners a clear idea of the types of entries sought (the control group was given only the survey). For treatment groups, strategy journals were collected regularly, and returned the following class session with feedback from the researchers. After the treatment, all the groups (including the control group) were given the strategy-inventory survey again.

The strategy-inventory survey (See Appendix A), which was used to examine the degree to which learners think they use LLS and consider LLS to be useful, was a modified version of Oxford’s Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990, pp. 293-300). Strategy journals used specific questions to facilitate learners’ reflection (Bray and Harsch, 1996; Nunan, 1996; Matsumoto, 1996). The many and varied benefits of using student journals extends across cognitive, affective, performance, social and organizational contexts (Ballantyne & Packer, 1995). The journal questions were:

- **During this past week, what strategies did you use?** Put a * next to ones that you feel are very useful.
- **Write about your experience learning or using English this week (either in class or outside).** Here are some questions to help you. You don’t have to answer all the questions – just choose one or two. Write in the box below (continue on the back of this paper if you want to write more).
  - Write about a difficult experience learning or using English that you had this week. What strategies could you use to improve in this area?
  - Write about a successful experience learning or using English that you had this week. What strategies did you use that helped you succeed? If you did it again, would you do it differently?
  - Did any of your classmates use strategies for learning or using English that you would like to try? What strategies did they use?
Data analysis

Individual participants’ scores on the survey were calculated as averages of their ratings, with scores appearing as a figure between 1 and 4. Item averages were also calculated for item analyses. Initial qualitative analysis of individual journal entries was performed using guidelines from the SILL (Oxford, 1990) to identify emerging patterns of LLS.

Research question 1 asks whether learners in different environments vary in their reported use of LLS and their perception of the usefulness of LLS. To answer this question, a MANOVA was run on pretest scores of ESL participants and EFL participants (grouping factor “location”) on the two SILL measures—1) reported use (Use) and 2) perceived usefulness (Usefulness) of LLS. For research questions 2 and 3—whether any strategies are identified as more frequently-used or more useful and whether there is a difference between ESL and EFL groups—item averages for each group were calculated and the ten highest-average items selected for qualitative analysis. SILL sub-part averages were also ranked for qualitative analysis. Research question 4 looks at the effects of the reflection journal on the participants’ use and perceived usefulness of LLS. A repeated measures MANOVA was applied to pre- and posttest scores on the “Use” and “Usefulness” measures. The grouping factor for this analysis was “treatment,” comparing the scores of the participants who completed the journals (the treatment group, consisting of the “ESL” and “EFL” groups) and those who did not (the control group). The significance level for the study was set at .05. However, because two statistical tests were run on the same data this figure was divided across the tests so that only figures less than .025 were considered significant.

Results and discussion

Research Question 1. Do participants in an EFL environment differ from participants in an ESL environment in (a) their reported use of LLS, and (b) the degree to which they perceive LLS to be useful?

Table 2 reports the mean scores and the results of the MANOVA on pretest data for EFL and ESL groups on the Use and Usefulness measures. ESL participants’ average rating on the Use scale was 2.89, which is statistically significantly higher than the EFL participants’ average rating of 2.54 ($p < .025$). However, there was no significant difference between ESL and EFL groups on the Usefulness scale.

**Table 2: Mean scores and results of MANOVA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>$M_{ESL}$ ($n=28$)</th>
<th>$M_{EFL}$ ($n=48$)</th>
<th>$SS$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$MS$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>2.057</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.057</td>
<td>22.66*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>6.512E-01</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.512E-01</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .025$

Why did ESL students report greater use of LLS than EFL students? Conceivable reasons for this may include: a) that ESL learners might be more motivated and active in their learning; for example, they made a decision to travel abroad, b) that outside the classroom students have more opportunities to use the target language and therefore have a greater need to use LLS, c) that these encounters in an English-speaking
environment makes learners more aware of strategy use, and d) learners stay in an English-speaking environment.

Why was there no significant difference in the degree to which ESL and EFL learners perceived LLS to be useful? One possible reason is that learners’ perceptions, existing ideas, knowledge, plus real or imagined experiences of LLS exist regardless of their environment. Also, pre-test results for perceived usefulness of LLS are not affected by treatment or any other form of consciousness-raising.

An interesting point emerging from Table 2 is that the mean scores between Use and Usefulness seem to differ considerably for both groups; from 2.89 and 3.13 for ESL and from 2.54 and 3.19 for EFL. Thus, although both groups use LLS, both groups’ perception of the usefulness of LLS is even higher, with EFL learners reporting a broader difference. One possible reason for this higher perception for EFL could be that learners’ expectations might be higher due to less experience in an English-speaking environment, or perhaps less awareness of LLS.

Research Question 2. Are there any salient strategies which learners identify using more frequently? How does this vary between ESL and EFL?

Table 3: “Use” SILL sub-parts – pre and post means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-part**</th>
<th>All Learners</th>
<th>EFL</th>
<th>ESL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part C = Compensating for missing knowledge</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>3.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part D = Organizing and evaluating your learning</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>3.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part F = Learning with others</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>3.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part B = Using all your mental processes</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part A = Remembering more effectively</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part E = Managing your emotions</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*=order different for EFL/ESL
** taken from Oxford, 1990

Table 3 shows the ranking of SILL sub-parts according to the pre and posttest means. It is interesting to note that there are both similarities and differences between EFL and ESL learners. Both groups have exactly the same order for their three lowest ranked sub-parts. Also, both groups have the same top three sub-parts, and for both groups there is a clear dip in mean scores between Part F (ranked 3rd) and Part B (ranked 4th), and another large drop between Parts B and A (ranked 4th and 5th). This suggests a fairly clear preference for sub-parts C, D, and F, and a clear disfavor of sub-parts A and E. One point of difference is that the top three sub-parts are in different order for EFL and ESL learners; however, the range for these items for ESL, 3.04-3.08, is quite small.

Table 4 indicates strategy items favored by each group of learners. It is interesting to note that six of these top ten items identified by both ESL and EFL were the same:

25. When I can’t think of a word during a conversation in English, I use body movement, or draw pictures.
29. If I can’t think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.
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 better learner of English.
45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.
Table 4: “Use” top ten items – pre and post means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>EFL*</th>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>ESL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.44</td>
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<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.28</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.26</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>2.97</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>14</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3.19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*all EFL subjects (treatment and control)

Of these, items 31, 32 and 33 are classified within the SILL as “Organizing and evaluating your learning”, items 25 and 29 are classified as “Compensating for missing knowledge”, and item 45 as “Learning with others”, the same sub-parts that are ranked as the top three from Table 3.

For both groups, the remaining four top-ten items are clearly different. Strategy items that were favored by EFL learners, but not ESL learners were:

3. I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.
10. I say or write new English words several times.
18. I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly), then go back and read carefully.
24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.

Of these, item 3 is classified within the SILL as “Remembering more effectively,” items 10 and 18 are classified as “Using all your mental processes,” and item 24 as “Compensating for missing knowledge”.

Strategy items that were favored by ESL learners, but not EFL learners were:

11. I try to talk like native English speakers.
15. I watch TV shows or movies in English.
38. I think about my progress in learning English.
49. I ask questions in English.

Of these, items 11, 14, and 15 are classified as “Using all your mental processes,” item 38 is classified as “Organizing and evaluating your learning,” and item 49 as “Learning with others”. The items that were the same for both groups seem to be strategies that learners in any environment deem important to both learning and using the target language. The items that were favored by EFL learners are probably related more to reading and “study” than to interaction with others, and thus it makes sense that these would be more important in the EFL-environment. The items that were favored by ESL learners focus more on taking advantage of the availability of native speakers and English-speaking sources, that is, they are noticeably using their environment, perhaps helping to explain why in the pre-test there was a significant difference in LLS Use
compared to EFL learners. It is interesting that some of these individual strategy items are in sub-part categories that were ranked lower overall, which indicates that at least some of the strategies in those “disfavored” sub-parts are not considered useless.

Table 5: Qualitative analysis of journal responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-groups of SILL in order of frequency</th>
<th>ESL</th>
<th>EFL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D. Organizing &amp; evaluating your learning</td>
<td>B. Using all your mental processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Using all your mental processes</td>
<td>F. Learning with others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Learning with others</td>
<td>D. Organizing &amp; evaluating your learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Remembering more effectively</td>
<td>C. Compensating for missing knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Managing your emotions</td>
<td>A. Remembering more effectively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Compensating for missing knowledge</td>
<td>E. Managing your emotions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 presents preliminary qualitative analysis of a cross-section of all journal entries for LLS Use identifying emerging patterns in order of saliency. One potentially interesting difference between ESL and EFL learners is that the ESL learners, according to both the survey and the journal data, use strategies for “Organizing and evaluating your learning” the most. For EFL learners, it was rated either 2nd in survey data and 3rd in journal data, so it appears that environment influences learners’ need(s) to use these kinds of strategies. Perhaps this is because ESL learners are in situations where they use English outside of the classroom much more readily than EFL learners, so they pay more attention to these strategies. Results also point to a clear disfavor of groups A & E (Remembering more effectively, and Managing your emotions). For Japanese learners, then, it is possibly safe to say that these strategies are not employed much, nor considered very useful, regardless of environment.

The fact that the EFL group favored learning with others helps support the belief that Japanese students in general, prefer working together harmoniously - to paraphrase the Japanese proverb, the nails that stick up get hammered down (Anderson, 1993) - and of the value placed on group-consciousness. We found cooperation and learning together to be prevalent with Japanese students in both environments. Our study differs to studies that report Japanese students have no preferred learning style (Reid, 1987; Hyland, 1994) and with a study by Dadour and Robbins (1996) that reports the desire of Japanese students to passively absorb information provided by teachers, this desire proving to be a substantial obstacle to successful LLS instruction. In our study, learners’ high ranking of strategies that involve learning with others suggests that they are well aware of and make full use of learning opportunities with other students or with native speakers.

Of particular note here is the rarity of journal entries that reflect sub-part C, “Compensating for missing knowledge,” which was ranked first overall in the survey results in Table 3. One would expect that compensatory strategies would be used a great deal in actual communicative situations, but at least in our preliminary review of journal entries, this does not appear to be the case. A more detailed analysis of journal entries, which is beyond the scope of this paper, may shed some light on this.
Research Question 3. Are there any salient strategies which learners consider more useful? How does this vary between ESL and EFL?

Table 6: “Usefulness” SILL sub-parts – pre and post means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-part*</th>
<th>All Learners</th>
<th>EFL</th>
<th>ESL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part C = Compensating for missing knowledge</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part D = Organizing and evaluating your learning</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part F = Learning with others</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part B = Using all your mental processes</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part A = Remembering more effectively</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part E = Managing your emotions</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* taken from Oxford, 1990

Table 6 shows the ranking of SILL sub-parts for Usefulness according to the pre and post-test means. It is interesting to note that there are no differences in rankings between EFL and ESL learners; both groups have exactly the same ranking for all six sub-parts. One interesting difference is that the clear dips in mean scores come at different points for ESL and EFL learners. For EFL, there are two major dips, one between Parts D and F (ranked 2nd and 3rd) and one between Parts A and E (ranked 5th and 6th), whereas for ESL, there is only one major dip, between Parts B and A (ranked 4th and 5th).

One salient point is that, for both groups, the top three sub-parts that are perceived as most useful are exactly the same as the three sub-parts that were reported most frequently in learners’ journal entries. Perhaps there is a clearer correlation between what they perceive as useful and what they actually use (as reported in journals), compared to what they think they use (as reported on the Use part of the survey). Another point of interest is that, like for Use, both groups again have sub-parts A and E as their two lowest groups. It appears safe to say, then, that for Japanese learners, these strategies are not employed much, nor are they considered very useful (although there may be individual strategies that learners in one environment or the other may use or consider useful).

Of further note is that Part C, “Compensating for missing knowledge”, was reported as being used the most according to the survey; however, for both ESL and EFL learners, it was ranked fourth in usefulness, and our journal data tends to support what learners reported under usefulness.

Table 7 indicates strategy items rated most useful by each group of learners. Four of these top ten items identified by both ESL and EFL were the same:

11. I try to talk like native English speakers.
30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.

Of these, item 11 is classified within the SILL as “Using all your mental processes”, items 30 and 32 are classified as “Organizing and evaluating your learning”, and item 45 as “Learning with others”; the same sub-parts that are ranked as the top three from Table 4 and from the journal entries in Table 6.
Table 7: “Usefulness” top ten items – pre and post means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>EFL*</th>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>ESL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>3.64</td>
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<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.63</td>
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<td>3.41</td>
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<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*all EFL subjects (treatment and control)

There were fifteen other strategy items that were in the top ten of one group but not the other. However, in contrast to the case for Research Question 2, where items ranked high by one group were ranked fairly low by the other, in this case all fifteen items were actually ranked quite high by both groups. One possible explanation for this is that, even if learners have never used a strategy, they can still recognize its usefulness. While the ESL group started with a significantly higher overall use of LLS (as shown in our discussion of the results for Research Question 1, learners in both ESL and EFL environments are aware of the potential usefulness of similar salient strategies. The fifteen salient strategies are perceived as being useful, however, it does not always follow that learners are actually using them. Correlation of the survey results with full coded journal analysis would help to provide evidence about which strategies are used as well as perceived useful.

Strategy items that were in the top ten for EFL learners, but not in ESL learners’ top ten were:

12. I practice the sounds of English.
25. When I can’t think of a word during a conversation in English, I use body movement, or draw pictures.
31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.
36. I try to read as much as possible in English.
50. I try to learn about the cultures of English speakers.

Strategy items that were in the top ten for ESL learners, but not in EFL learners’ top ten were:

2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.
15. I watch TV shows or movies in English.
29. If I can’t think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.
35. I look for people I can talk to in English.
46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.
48. I ask for help from English speakers.
49. I ask questions in English.

Of these, item 2 is classified within the SILL as “Remembering more effectively,” items 12, 14, and 15 as “Using all your mental processes,” items 25 and 29 as “Compensating
for missing knowledge,” items 31, 33, 35, and 36 as “Organizing and evaluating your learning,” and items 46, 48, 49 and 50 as “Learning with others” (Oxford, 1990).

It is noteworthy that items from “Managing your emotions”, are missing from both groups’ top ten, and there is only one item for “Remembering more effectively.” This coincides with the overall ranking of sub-parts and what was found in journal data. It could be beneficial for teachers to discuss with their Japanese students ways in which these strategies can be useful, and to encourage these learners to consider trying them. At the same time, it is important for teachers to hear out their students’ reasons for not considering these strategies useful; perhaps there are legitimate cultural roadblocks that make these LLS not very relevant for Japanese learners.

**Research Question 4. Is there any evidence that metacognitive reflection on strategies leads to greater use or an increased perceived usefulness of LLS?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Use Pre</th>
<th>Use Post</th>
<th>Useful Pre</th>
<th>Useful Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total (76)</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment (50)</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control (26)</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 9: Results of repeated measures MANOVA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of variance</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within-Subjects Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use</td>
<td>18.933</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18.933</td>
<td>129.848*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness</td>
<td>.618</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.618</td>
<td>5.693*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between-Subjects Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment vs. Control</td>
<td>.799</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.799</td>
<td>2.764</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .025

To investigate possible effects of the treatment, pre- and post-test scores for treatment and control groups were compared on both the Use and Usefulness measures. As the mean scores in Table 8 indicate, both groups showed gains on both post-test measures. The repeated measures MANOVA within-subjects effects (Table 9) reveals that these gains are statistically significant when all participants are taken together, but when the treatment variable is included, there is no significant effect between subjects. This means that the treatment group did not score significantly higher gains than the control group. In other words, there may have been a “test effect” -- that is, taking the survey twice may have had as much effect as writing the journals. Maybe during or after completing the pre-treatment survey, students realized they did use some strategies, or they didn’t have them and so tried to use them, or after completing the pre-treatment survey they found a name for strategies they didn’t have a name for before. Thus, it is possible that the survey itself was a form of metacognitive reflection, although we cannot say for sure if this is the case. Perhaps any kind of consciousness-raising or awareness might lead to similar results. The next step of fully coding the strategy journals will help correlate these emerging results.

However, because this is a pilot study with a number of constraints (see below), one should be wary of any generalizations about the control group’s increases. One problem is that the lack of an ESL control group caused a design imbalance in the study. Also,
there are several possible reasons for the gains posted by the control group: a) the learners remembered using some of the strategies listed in the pre-test survey, b) they became more aware of LLS during the time the class was taught because classroom interaction required greater use of strategies, c) they may have been taught specific LLS in class by their teacher, as teaching styles and methods were not controlled for d) textbooks used in the course may have highlighted LLS providing practice opportunities or e) self-report variance. In this pilot study, we were not able to control for many potential causes of the test effect, but having found them, we can now control for as many of them as possible in the full-scale study we are planning to conduct.

**Constraints affecting the pilot study**

The pilot study is constrained by three main factors related to the subjects selected for the study. First, because teachers and subjects participated on a voluntary basis in the ESL group, the researchers had limited control over the attrition rate; the reduced n-size limits the generalizability of results. Second, there is a discrepancy in the number of hours of classes in English, with the students in Hawai`i having more hours of exposure to English in the classroom. Third, for a full-scale study, standardized tests (e.g., TOEIC or TOEFL) would ensure that students in both the ESL and EFL environments really fall within a similar range of abilities.

A further constraint involves the control group. In this study, the control group consisted of only EFL learners, but it would be more conclusive to have both ESL and EFL learners in both the treatment and control groups. Additionally, as mentioned previously, teaching styles need to be controlled for to ensure that teachers of control groups do not inadvertently raise students’ awareness, or use, of LLS.

Another constraint has to do with determining “awareness” of LLS. Our strategy inventory looks at the extent to which students use strategies and the extent to which they consider them useful, but it is quite possible that a learner could be aware of a strategy but neither use it nor consider it useful. Or, they could use strategies but not remember them or incorrectly report strategies because they may not remember them. The reflection required for strategy journals, however, may help students to “notice” (Schmidt, 1990) strategies.

**Implications**

This pilot study conducted in two culturally different higher education settings and focusing on learners, not teachers, has helped highlight important pedagogical issues and, importantly, identified what we (the authors) value.

**Value for learners**

*The value in making LLS known to learners to help facilitate the learning process.* Since learners often have a limited awareness of LLS they may benefit over time by responding to forms of self-report such as strategy journals “because they become more aware of and attentive to their learning processes” (Oxford et al, 1996). Strategy journals provide a written record and give students opportunities to think about how they perceive their own learning.
The value of consciousness-raising and building on what learners already have. Learners’ use of strategies often depends on variables such as age, personality, preferred learning styles (Reid, 1987), or purpose for learning. By looking at the broader sub-categories of the SILL students may be encouraged to think about which kinds of strategies they use most and to perhaps consider adding new strategies to their repertoires as they become more aware of other ways to learn (Oxford 1990).

The value of receiving teacher feedback and shared information. Teachers’ written responses on journals (which included acceptance, encouragement, praise, constructive comments and suggestions) provide each individual learner with feedback on the specific strategies they are using, as well as encouragement and motivation to continue exploring how they learn and use the target language. In addition, providing students with a “newsletter” which shares pooled (anonymous) LLS gives each learner a chance to see how others learn, identify with other learners and discover new ways to go about learning. In this study, the researchers actively responded to every completed journal, providing positive written feedback and communicative dialogues. While analysis of learner/researcher dialogues are beyond the scope of this study, the value of such one-on-one communication reinforces one way students can receive tangible pedagogical support for diverse learning styles.

Value for teachers

The value of being aware of learner differences in EFL and ESL language learning environments. As research indicates, teachers can sometimes be unaware of or mistaken about their students’ use or preferred use of LLS (Oxford, Lavine and Crookall, 1989). Uncovering information about their students LLS (or lack thereof) may provide useful insights that prompt teachers to change or modify the way they plan, teach and interact with students, thus helping learners overcome challenges in new language learning environments. In addition, teachers may take into account other variables, for example, preferred strategies, cultural considerations and access to opportunities outside the classroom environment.

The value of a learner-centered approach. Nunan (1999) describes a learner-centered approach as “a matter of educating learners so they can gradually assume responsibility for their own learning” (p.12). Proponents of this approach to teaching endorse LLS as necessary tools for facilitating learner autonomy (see also Nambiar, 1998; Nunan and Lamb, 1996; Benson and Voller, 1997). Helping learners become more aware of LLS and develop a thorough repertoire of these strategies, and having them reflect on their experiences of learning and using the target language helps them to become more autonomous learners. This, we believe, respects learner diversity and helps make learning more effective.

The value of teachers learning from students. When students in different environments find certain strategies useful or successful some teachers may need to learn these salient strategies. That is, learning can be two-way. Teachers can learn from their students in order to promote and support LLS as well as realize that no (one) group of strategies fits every learner, and that in particular, EFL and ESL learners can vary in their use and perceived usefulness of LLS.

As our biodata suggests, even students from the same culture have diverse backgrounds. This is especially true in ESL environments like Hawaii or Australia, but it is true even in
supposedly homogeneous EFL environments like Japan. Different learners have differing exposure to diverse learning traditions and learning styles, so in addition to having certain preferences, some may also have less familiarity with alternatives. Thus, it makes sense that no one teaching formula will work.

Value for both learners and teachers

_The value of reflection_. Having learners reflect on LLS can make them more aware of opportunities, and can make them think about how they might incorporate or use them more. Reflection on how we learn gives us more awareness, which leads to more control over our learning. The core of reflective teaching is when individual teachers attempt to examine their own practice to develop a better and deeper understanding of themselves, their students and the learning process.

Future research

In addition to conducting the larger study from this pilot study, we have discovered associated areas of inquiry that merit future research.

Stemming from research question 1, another possible aspect to consider is the variable of length of residence in an English speaking environment. Perhaps relevant is the fact that the EFL Control group has had no time outside Japan at all and the EFL group has had considerably less time than the ESL group in an English-speaking environment. This could have contributed to the significantly higher use of strategies reported by ESL learners in the pre-treatment survey. In comparing the two environments, it is clear that opportunities to use English in Japan are generally very limited. In this sense, the control group started out at a “disadvantage” in terms of having spent no time at all outside their native country. Nevertheless, post-test results do not show a significant difference in reported use across all groups. It raises an interesting research-related question: “Why is it that, given far fewer opportunities to use English in an EFL environment, the two EFL groups improved in strategy use?” Part of the answer could be that students were engaged in class situations where they had opportunities to actually use English, and for many of them, this may have been the first time. This could have resulted in the jump that enabled them to improve. For example, Yamashita (1996a) reported significant differences between Japanese returnee students compared to non-returnee students because of the uniqueness of overseas language experiences.

Further research on learning environment is clearly warranted. Environment _does_ seem to have some effect. Although there were common strategies across environments, there were also strategies that were favored by learners in one environment or the other. This suggests that, for some reason, these strategies make sense to learners in the specific environment; in other words, it seems that learners made a connection, as Vann & Abraham (1990) suggest needs to be made, between their environment-specific needs and certain LLS.

Additionally, although our study did not compare whether gender had an effect on LLS use, we feel it would be of value to examine this variable across EFL/ESL environments, perhaps contributing to existing findings. For example, Oxford (1996) states that for “…many cultures around the world, strategy use often differs by gender – but not always” (p.247). Yamashita (1996b) reported significant differences in learning style.
preferences between genders, and Kaylani (1996) investigated differences in what LLS Middle East EFL males and female learners chose and used.

Conclusion

Twenty years ago, second language researchers were calling for more of a focus on the learner in the classroom (Hosenfield, 1979). This study was prompted by this same belief that learning begins with the learner. It attempted to compare the kinds of strategies that are used and considered useful by similar-level Japanese learners in ESL and EFL environments. As both a research tool and an extended classroom activity strategy journals help provide access to the often hidden processes that ESL and EFL learners use to accomplish their goals. Such data not only offers deeper insights into the process of language learning but also provides teachers with a better understanding of their second and foreign language learners. Teachers need to recognize that for EFL and ESL learners in particular, the environment can play an important part when learning another language. As higher education institutions become increasingly multi-cultural, the authors hope that this study will assist teachers in supporting the diverse learning styles of foreign students, as well as implementing strategy journals in all language learning environments as a means of encouraging reflection. Perhaps for both teachers and students learning in general might become easier, faster or more fun.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Mary Christianson for her valuable and timely assistance with statistical analysis and feedback. We also wish to thank John Kahle, Terry Cesta and Betty Osako for their cooperation and assistance in helping gather data.

1 A learner of English as a second language is one who is in a country where English is the primary language used, and a learner of English as a foreign language is in a country where a language other than English is primary. Thus, in this study, ESL refers to the students learning English in Hawaii, and EFL refers to the students learning English in Japan.

2 It is useful here to address the issue of the slipperiness of defining “strategies.” For instance, what some would define as “strategies,” others would define as “tactics,” and some researchers feel that “communication strategies” are separate from “language learning strategies,” while others feel the latter encompasses the former (see Oxford and Cohen, 1992 and Nambiar, 1998 for commentary on these issues). For the purpose of helping our subjects understand what we were seeking (particularly lower-level subjects), we defined “language learning strategies” in a more encompassing way, as “Things you can do to make learning or using English easier, faster or more fun.”


4 Due to time constraints, it was not possible to review and redo the biodata table for this conference. Any discrepancies in numbers of reported biodata compared to statistical analysis is due to some subjects who did not complete both the pre and post test survey.

5 It was interesting that, in a post-treatment discussion with one sub-group of ESL learners, several learners agreed that the journal assignment helped them to “make the most of opportunities” that they may not have otherwise had. Several entries illustrate that making the most of opportunities included a variety of strategies, such as creating chances to talk with native speakers, or noting new vocabulary (from newspapers, magazines, TV and movies, as well as others’ conversations) and asking native-speaker friends about them.

6 For the full-fledged study, we intend to have four groups of 50 subjects each (ESL and EFL treatment groups, and ESL and EFL control groups).
Enhancing the learning experience with strategy journals

References


Appendix: Strategy Inventory

Part A

1. I think of connections 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 a new English word and an image or picture of the word 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 new English 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 words I know in different ways.


15. I watch TV shows or movies 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 body movement, or draw pictures.

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 in the dictionary.

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 will have enough time to study English.
35. I look for people I can talk to in English.
36. I try 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 mistakes.
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 or using 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 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 cultures of English speakers.

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**Strategy Inventory Answer Sheet (sample)**

For each strategy, circle the number that best fits you for “Do you use this strategy?” and “How useful is this strategy?” Answer what is really true for you -- not how you think you should be, or what other people do. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer as quickly as you can. If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand, please ask a teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you use this strategy?</th>
<th>How useful is this strategy?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 = Never true of me</td>
<td>1 = Not at all useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 = Usually not true of me</td>
<td>2 = Not very useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 = Usually true of me</td>
<td>3 = Somewhat useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 = Always true of me</td>
<td>4 = Very useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Part A**

1) 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4
2) 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4